

THE
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RIVER
VALLEY
REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

MARIST

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From the Editors

Central Park turns 150 this year, and while it is south of our usual territory, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux each has roots and legacies in the Hudson Valley, and their work together in New York City is tied to that. Just as Olmsted and Vaux influenced generations of artists and landscape architects that followed, Washington Irving created a “school” of contemporaries and continues to influence writers today. Our article about America’s first internationally successful author explores the Gothic inspiration—in architecture and literature—he gleaned from Sir Walter Scott. From the 1800s, we jump to twentieth-century architecture and parking lots, in an examination of urban life and renewal in the Village of Catskill. We continue up the river, but back in time and again toward the Gothic, ending with a discussion of an early and unattributed work by Herman Melville. (We also publish this short work in its entirety.)

Our regional forums bookend the valley as well—stretching from Boscobel to the historic sites of Troy. But before we end with our usual book reviews and exploration of new and noteworthy books, we feature a new section, titled “Regional Writing,” which will be dedicated each issue to the publication of one poem from and/or about our region. Our spring selection is entitled “Winter: New York State.”

*Reed Sparling
Christopher Pryslopsi*

Correction:

The image that appeared on page 5 of our Autumn 2007 issue of the Review was incorrectly credited. It is from the collections of The New Jersey Historical Society, Newark, New Jersey, a statewide, private, non-profit historical museum, library, and archives dedicated to collecting, preserving, and interpreting the rich and intricate political, social, cultural, and economic history of New Jersey to the broadest possible audiences. Learn more at www.jerseyhistory.org.



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Call for Essays

The Hudson River Valley Review is anxious to consider essays on all aspects of the Hudson Valley—its intellectual, political, economic, social, and cultural history, its prehistory, architecture, literature, art, and music—as well as essays on the ideas and ideologies of regionalism itself. All articles in *The Hudson River Valley Review* undergo peer analysis.

Submission of Essays and Other Materials

HRVR prefers that essays and other written materials be submitted as two double-spaced typescripts, generally no more than thirty pages long with endnotes, along with a computer disk with a clear indication of the operating system, the name and version of the word-processing program, and the names of documents on the disk. Illustrations or photographs that are germane to the writing should accompany the hard copy. Otherwise, the submission of visual materials should be cleared with the editors beforehand. Illustrations and photographs are the responsibility of the authors. No materials will be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is provided. No responsibility is assumed for their loss. An e-mail address should be included whenever possible.

HRVR will accept materials submitted as an e-mail attachment (*hrvi@marist.edu*) once they have been announced and cleared beforehand.

Since HRVR is interdisciplinary in its approach to the region and to regionalism, it will honor the forms of citation appropriate to a particular discipline, provided these are applied consistently and supply full information. Endnotes rather than footnotes are preferred. In matters of style and form, HRVR follows *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

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On the cover:

A portrait of Melville as a young man by Asa Twitchell.
Courtesy of the Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield, Mass.



Fig. 2: Transverse Road Number 2, with the tower on Vista Rock in the distance.
Photograph by W. H. Guild. From W. H. Guild and Fred. B. Perkins,
The Central Park (New York, 1864)

Central Park at 150: Celebrating Olmsted and Vaux's Greensward Plan

David Schuyler

Shortly after the lower part of Central Park first opened to visitors in the fall of 1859, journalist Horace Greeley toured New York's new recreational ground and concluded that the designers had "let it alone a good deal more than I thought they would." That remark must have rankled Frederick Law Olmsted, the park's co-designer and architect-in-chief. Fourteen years later, when writing a report to the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks, Olmsted explained just how massive an undertaking the building of Central Park had been. He calculated that workers handled 4,825,000 cubic yards of stone and earth during construction, "or nearly ten millions of ordinary city one-horse cart-loads, which, in single file, would make a procession thirty thousand... miles in length"—that is, extending from New York to San Francisco, and back again, five times. So much material was moved during construction that it was equivalent to changing the grade of the 843-acre park by four feet. Only such heroic efforts could have transformed the site into a scene of seemingly natural beauty.¹

Two images convey the condition of the park site prior to commencement of construction. The first, an 1854 lithograph by John Bornet, shows the area of the park in quite accurate detail. The most prominent landmark is the old rectangular Croton Receiving Reservoir, which had been built by the Croton Aqueduct commission and had begun operating in 1842. The reservoir stood in the center of the future park site between 79th and 86th streets. Other recognizable buildings on the Bornet lithograph include the castellated Arsenal, near Fifth Avenue at 64th Street, which had been erected as an armory by New York State in 1851, and Mount St. Vincent, a convent of the Sisters of Charity near 105th Street. A number of other structures are visible, including a tall smokestack and a cluster of small dwellings on the west side of the park, near 86th Street. The overall impression of Bornet's lithograph is of a treeless, scarred landscape, a place on the periphery of the city that had been given over to nuisance uses.²

The second image is the topographical map prepared in 1856 by Egbert L. Viele, who was the first chief engineer of Central Park, which documents conditions on the site prior to development. The scattering of rooftops on the west side of the park near 86th Street was Seneca Village, a community of 264 residents in 1855, living in an area extending from Seventh to Eighth Avenue and from 82nd to 88th street. Historians Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar have demonstrated that blacks represented roughly seventy percent of the population of Seneca Village, while Irish-Americans constituted approximately thirty percent. The village was undoubtedly the most stable African-American community in the city, as there were two churches and a school and more than half of the households owned their own homes. The Viele map also identifies the location of other settlements within the park site, including several clusters of Irish and German residents. As many as 1,600 people lived within the boundaries of what became the park. During the fall of 1857, laborers demolished or removed 300 dwellings as well as a number of factories to make way for improvements to the park.³

In addition to these two images, written accounts document the existence of hog pens, small factories, and other unsightly uses. Viele described the site as a “pestilential spot, where rank vegetation and miasmatic odors taint every breath of air,” while Olmsted found it to be “filthy, squalid and disgusting,” as it contained not trees and grass but wretched hovels and “heaps of cinders, brick-bats, potsherds, and other rubbish.” The southern part of the future park was “a very nasty place,” Olmsted concluded, as the “low grounds were steeped in [the] overflow and mush of pig sties, slaughter houses and bone boiling works, and the stench was sickening.” There is nothing in Borner’s lithograph or Viele’s map, or, indeed, in other documentary sources, to suggest that the park site prior to development was a place of natural beauty or a landscape that might become one.⁴

Photographs of the park taken shortly after its opening capture the newness of the plantings. There were no stands of tall trees to provide shade, and what trees and shrubs embellished the ground were newly planted. A stereographic view looking north across the pond near 59th Street reveals the presence of rock that was an enormous obstacle during construction as well as tiny, recently planted shrubs and trees. Other photographs similarly depict a landscape in the process of formation that would mature slowly. Olmsted had no idea that he would become a landscape architect and park maker in 1850, when he took a walking tour of England and the Continent. Yet his first reaction to Eaton Park that summer was remarkably prescient of the professional career he would choose: “What artist, so noble, has often been my thought, as he, who with far reaching conception of beauty and designing power, sketches the outline, writes the colours, and directs

the shadows of a picture so great that Nature shall be employed upon it for generations, before the work he has arranged for her shall realize his intentions." Only a decade or more in the future, Olmsted predicted in 1858, when Central Park had become a mature landscape, would "the priceless value of the present picturesque outlines of the ground . . . be more distinctly perceived, and its adaptability for its purposes more fully recognized."⁵

Thus one measure of the new park's success as a work of urban planning is that it struck New Yorkers such as Greeley as a place that needed some drives and paths, some new plantings, but not that it was an artfully designed landscape built at enormous cost. The park's creators knew, however. Calvert Vaux, who shared equal responsibility with Olmsted in the design of Central Park and who described Greeley's reaction to the landscape in a letter to art critic Clarence Cook, added, "We concealed the processes from him. But there were processes and nearly all was intended and foreseen." Indeed, the park is humanly created, just as are the surrounding streets and skyscrapers. Its naturalistic landscape stands as one of the most creative responses to urbanization undertaken in nineteenth-century America.⁶

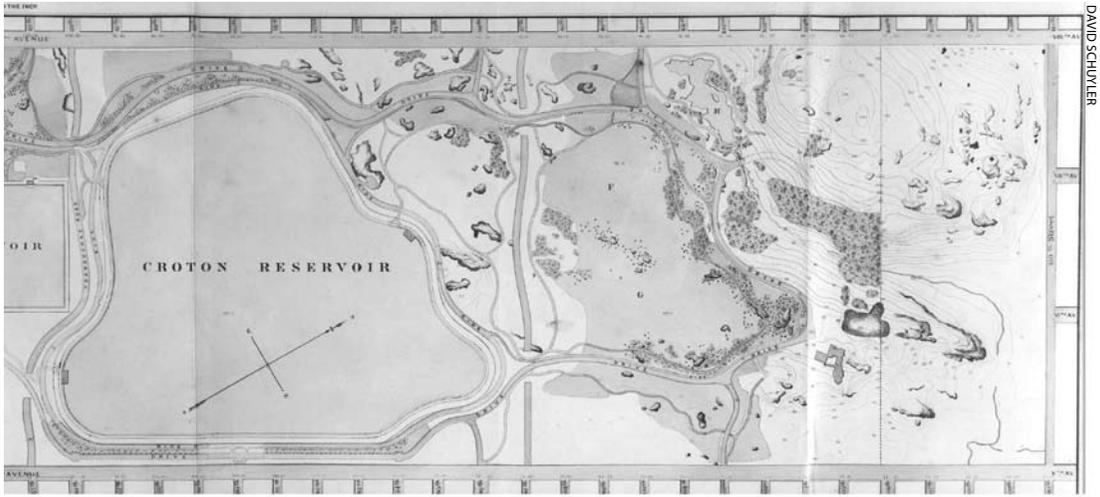
There is one other dimension to the establishment of Central Park: the long-term vision that was essential to its creation. In the mid-1850s, the built area of Manhattan was still almost twenty blocks distant from the park's southernmost point at 59th Street. Taking into account the extension of the northern boundary from 106th to 110th Street, which was approved by the park commissioners in 1858 but which was not completed until 1863, Central Park occupies 153 city blocks and 9,792 standard 25-by-100 foot Manhattan lots. This was land that had to be purchased (in many cases repurchased) by the city in the mid-1850s at a cost of approximately \$5,029,000. To take that much land from future development and set it aside for public recreational use was a remarkable act of stewardship, one that implicitly recognized the inexorable nature of urban growth in New York. At the heart of the Greensward plan was Olmsted and Vaux's understanding of population growth in nineteenth-century New York, which decade after decade far outstripped any previous efforts to plan for the future. Although in 1859 Olmsted described the park as being in the city's "straggling suburbs," he and Vaux realized that "twenty years hence, the town will have enclosed the Central Park." Prophetically, they predicted, "No longer an open suburb, our ground will have around it a continuous high wall of brick, stone, and marble." Practically they shaped their design to meet the requirements of a time "when New York will be built up, when all the grading and filling will be done, and when the picturesquely-varied, rocky formations of the Island will have been converted into foundations



Fig 1: Central Park. Map of the Central Park Showing the progress of the Work up to January 1st 1863. From Board of Commissioner of the Central Park, *Sixth Annual Report* (New York, 1863)

for rows of monotonous straight streets, and piles of erect, angular buildings.”⁷

Olmsted and Vaux’s plan for Central Park, Greensward (fig. 1), was selected from among thirty-three entrants in a public competition for designs on April 28, 1858. Thus 2008 marks the 150th anniversary of the plan for the first great urban park in the United States. In recent years, historians have assessed the printed textual descriptions of the plans as well as the four large-scale drawings that have survived, and have debated whether the board of commissioners determined the winning entries based on politics or merit. There was a political dimension to the voting—the Olmsted-Vaux plan was clearly the choice of Republican members of the commission⁸—but Greensward also had several distinctive components that made it the most advantageous choice. The requirements of the competition specified that four or more streets cross the park, which was almost two and a half miles in length. Anticipating that these roads would become “crowded thoroughfares” that intruded upon the tranquility of the park, Olmsted and Vaux placed the crosstown streets below grade, which effectively prevented the park from being divided into five or more spaces and enabled the designers to create a unified landscape. They also suggested that a “little judicious planting” in areas adjacent to the transverse roads (fig. 2) and on the bridges carrying the drives and paths over them would “entirely conceal both the roads and the vehicles moving in them, from the view of those walking or driving in the park.” The Olmsted and Vaux entry was the only plan that minimized the impact of the crossing streets on



the landscape in this or any other way. The designers also provided for the separation of pedestrian paths and carriage drives at two points in the Greensward plan. When two commissioners called for the inclusion of a bridle path within the park, they added nineteen bridges to provide a complete separation of ways throughout the park (fig. 3). By January 1859 Olmsted reported that “all parts of the lower Park may be traversed on foot without encountering a single carriage or horseman.”⁹

The terms of the competition for designs required a hall for exhibitions and



Fig 3: Lithograph of Oval Bridge, a cast iron structure carrying a pedestrian path over the bridle path. This is one of more than twenty bridges that were constructed to provide a complete separation of all forms of traffic. From Board of Commissioner of the Central Park, Sixth Annual Report (New York, 1863)

concerts, playgrounds, a prominent fountain, and a flower garden. Instead of constructing a new exhibition hall, Olmsted and Vaux recommended that the Arsenal near the southeast corner of the park serve that function and attempted to minimize the visual impact of the building by planting trees and shrubs around it. They made provision for the other requirements of the competition—the flower garden, the arboretum, and the site for a music hall—in what they called the “dress ground” along the eastern boundary of the park north of the Arsenal. By collecting these structures and formal elements adjacent to Fifth Avenue, Olmsted and Vaux ensured that the rest of the park would be much more naturalistic. In a landscape that required heroic effort and expense to construct, Olmsted and Vaux subordinated art to nature.¹⁰

Another distinctive feature of the Greensward plan was the conscious attempt to create a visual and psychological separation of park and city. The primary intent of the plan, Olmsted and Vaux explained, was to create an expanse of park scenery within the urban environment, a landscape that would meet the recreational needs of city residents. They realized that the park had to achieve “something more than mere exemption from urban conditions,” that it should instead “secure an antithesis of objects of vision to those of the streets and houses.” In Olmsted’s conception, the park would be a pastoral landscape within the city and provide to residents “an aspect of spaciousness and tranquility, with variety and intricacy of arrangement, thereby affording the most agreeable contrast to the confinement, bustle, and monotonous street-division of the city.” The park, Olmsted insisted, was the one place in the city designed to meet the recreational needs of all residents, a place that would “supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers, who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country, a specimen of God’s handiwork that shall be to them, inexpensively, what a month or two in the White Mountains or the Adirondacks is, at great cost, to those in easier circumstances.” The park would be the country within the city, nature—improved by art—offering welcome relief from the “compulsory art of the city.”¹¹

The Greensward design thus attempted to create within the humanly built city an equally artificial but seemingly natural landscape. Olmsted and Vaux attempted to sequester the park from the city that eventually would surround it by planting a thick screen of tall trees along the park’s boundaries to block the view of the cityscape. They also suggested mounding the earth and the use of plantings to screen the most conspicuous structure within the park—the high walls of the old Croton receiving reservoir—and thereby to avoid an awkward visual conflict between the designed and the engineered landscape. In Olmsted’s conception of the park, nature would reign supreme.¹²

Olmsted and Vaux anticipated that the principal entrance to the park would be at Fifth Avenue and 59th Street. From there they directed traffic in curvilinear lines around the pond to the pedestrian promenade, or Mall. A long, elm-shaded avenue, the Mall extended almost a quarter mile diagonally northward through the lower park, ending at the Terrace. Although “averse on general principles to a symmetrical arrangement of trees,” Olmsted and Vaux explained that the Mall’s diagonal direction would lead visitors into the interior of the park. Pedestrians strolling down the Mall would see in the distance the Ramble and the proposed tower on Vista Rock, the highest point in the lower park. By framing this view, the Mall would “withdraw attention” from the park’s boundaries. Moreover, Olmsted and Vaux considered it essential that a metropolitan park contain a “grand promenade, level, spacious, and thoroughly shaded.” In the Greensward plan they used the Mall to incorporate a space for concerts and an arbor, which they located near the northeastern end of the avenue, and the site for a prominent fountain at the Terrace.¹³

Olmsted and Vaux gave the Mall such attention because they considered it a central feature of the lower park, and they attributed to it a visual importance comparable to that of a mansion in a private estate. Olmsted and Vaux considered the people the owners of the park, and instead of an elegant building they made a tree-lined avenue the focal point for the lower park. Indeed, in the text accompanying the Greensward plan they wrote, “we conceive that all such architectural structures should be confessedly subservient to the main idea” of the design, the landscape itself. The avenue would function as an “open air hall of reception” and provide opportunities for what Olmsted described as gregarious recreation—for walks, or promenades, with rustic seats carefully placed to promote social intercourse. Despite the Mall’s formal design, Olmsted and Vaux carefully arranged the surrounding landscape in a naturalistic manner, placing trees and shrubbery nearby so that the rows of elms would not be visible except when looking directly down the avenue.¹⁴

At the northern end of the Mall Olmsted and Vaux located the Terrace (today known as Bethesda Terrace). Designed by Vaux and Jacob Wrey Mould, the Terrace was the largest architectural structure in the park. It carried the central drive over a pedestrian underpass, and massive stairways led from the drive to the plaza below. The great hall under the drive provided shelter during inclement weather as well as other amenities for park visitors. The designers used the Terrace as the location of a prominent fountain, which in 1872 became the site of *The Angel of the Waters*, a sculpture by Emma Stebbins. Just as the Old Testament angel transformed the pools at Bethesda into a cure for the sick in Jerusalem, so



Fig. 4: Lithograph of Lake and Boat Landing. From Board of Commissioner of the Central Park, *Sixth Annual Report* (New York, 1863)

the sculpture asserted that the pure water of the Croton system and the park's landscape were essential to the good health of New York's residents.¹⁵

Olmsted and Vaux made the Terrace and plaza a focal point in the lower park not only because of its location adjacent to the lake (fig. 4) but also because at the Terrace the hills to either side blocked all views of the city and the walls of the Croton receiving reservoir were "planted out." From this vantage, Olmsted explained, the "whole breadth of the Park will be brought into this landscape." A pedestrian reaching the plaza from the stairs would experience a foreground "enriched with architectural decorations and a fountain," a middle distance of the lake, the rocks and hillside on the opposite shore, where evergreens and broad-leaved shrubs were reflected in the water, and a distance made all the more remote by the conscious use of lighter colors and less distinct foliage.¹⁶

Across the lake from the Terrace was the Ramble, a rocky, hilly area. Although the Greensward plan located a carriage drive through the Ramble, as construction progressed it was eliminated—undoubtedly because the topography would have made the cost prohibitive—and the area was designed solely for pedestrians. Although Olmsted later asserted that "very rugged ground, abrupt eminences, and what is technically called picturesque in distinction from merely beautiful or simply pleasing scenery, is not the most desirable in a town park," he and Vaux designed the Ramble to take advantage of its natural features, the rocks

and ravines. They proposed removing some of the stone and adding soil to support a variety of broad-leaf shrubs and evergreens and other elements of picturesque scenery. Olmsted described his intent for this area and the northern arm of the lake in a letter to Central Park gardener Ignaz Pilat in 1863. The tropical scenery he experienced while crossing the Isthmus of Panama impressed upon him “a sense of the superabundant creative power, infinite resource, and liberality of Nature—the childish playfulness and profuse careless utterance of Nature.” Olmsted informed Pilat that he had been “rather blindly and instinctively” attempting to achieve the effect of tropical scenery in picturesque areas of the park. Throughout the Ramble he located secluded walks and rustic seats, as well as an artificial watercourse, the Ambergill, which flowed out of a rock and meandered through the landscape until it cascaded into the lake. When the plants had matured, one visitor described the Ramble as “the most attractive and satisfactory part of the park.” Here was a scene of rural beauty “very unlike what one would expect to find in a great city,” for in the Ramble the “art of concealing Art was never better illustrated.”¹⁷

Throughout the rest of the lower park, Olmsted and Vaux emphasized pastoral scenery, (fig. 5) which Olmsted described in 1866 as consisting of “combinations of trees, standing singly or in groups, and casting their shadows over broad stretches of turf, or repeating their beauty by reflection upon the calm surface of pools, and the predominant associations are in the highest degree tranquilizing



Fig 5: Pastoral scenery exemplified: the Long Meadow, Prospect Park, Brooklyn, N.Y., c. 1890. National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, Mass.

and grateful, as expressed by the Hebrew poet, 'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters.'" Although this passage from the twenty-third Psalm was written more than two millennia before the establishment of Central Park, Olmsted found it particularly appropriate to describe the kind of scenery he considered essential in an urban park: pastoral scenery was so welcome to city residents because it was the antithesis of the streets and buildings that framed their everyday life. The "beauty of the park," Olmsted explained in 1870, "should be the beauty of the fields, the meadow, the prairie, of the green pastures, and the still waters." He believed that this type of park scenery would be tranquilizing and restorative, that it would produce in visitors an "unbending of the faculties," a process of recuperation from the stresses and strains of urban life. Clarence Cook, who surely represented the thoughts of Olmsted and Vaux in writing his *Description of the New York Central Park*, similarly insisted that the park was "a place of rest and recreation for mind and body," where "nature soothes and tranquilizes the mind" and calls the body to healthful exercise.¹⁸

Given the rockiness of the ground and its undulating topography, creating pastoral scenery in the lower park was difficult and expensive, but Olmsted and Vaux considered it so important that they blasted tons of rock and filled the ground with soil brought into the park. The result was impressive. From the Merchant's Gate entrance at Eighth Avenue and 59th Street, the visitor approached two large expanses of turf. One, the playground, was an area of fourteen acres; the other, described as the Central Plateau, was a swampy, rocky, thirty-three acre area that they transformed, by blasting and filling, into a broad, sweeping lawn of gently undulating surface known today as the Sheep Meadow (fig. 6). Although the Central Plateau would occasionally be used for military displays and militia exercises, Olmsted intended that it function as "a great country green or open common." Together, these two large expanses of lawn, which sprawled visually over the southernmost transverse road, created the impression of a sweeping landscape that terminated at Vista Rock, the highest point in the Ramble. "Here is a suggestion of freedom and repose," Olmsted and Vaux later wrote, "which must in itself be refreshing and tranquilizing to the visitor coming from the confinement and bustle of the crowded street."¹⁹

Along the western side of the park Olmsted and Vaux located a winter drive, a mile and a half long, that was thickly planted with evergreens as well as a few deciduous trees. Throughout the area they created glades in order to achieve the scenic effect of a "richly wooded country, in which the single trees and copses have had plenty of space for developing their distinctive characteristics to advantage." The winter drive ensured that the park's landscape would remain interesting even



Fig 6: The Sheep Meadow, 1983

when the deciduous trees were bare.²⁰

In the upper park, the area north of the reservoirs, the character of the landscape was much different from that of the lower park. In the northwest corner, the topography was “bold and sweeping,” while elsewhere the ground provided opportunities to create the largest expanses of grass in the park. As breadth of scenery was “in most decided contrast to the confined and formal lines of the city,” the designers explained that symmetrical plantings, architectural elements, and roads should not interfere with the landscape effects. In addition to the northern meadow, Olmsted and Vaux located in the upper park a rugged ravine with cascading watercourse, as well as the arboretum (one of the required elements in the competition for design), which they placed at the northeast corner of the park along Fifth Avenue. The arboretum was eliminated as the plan was implemented and the site became a conservatory garden and a small lake, the Harlem Meer.²¹

Building Central Park was a heroic undertaking. During the peak times of construction as many as 3,800 men were employed. Between 1858 and 1870, Olmsted calculated, workers used 260 tons of gunpowder to remove rocky outcroppings or to create the tunnels of the transverse roads. Olmsted established a nursery on the park; over the course of the first decade of construction, workers used more than 46,000 cubic yards of manure and compost in preparing ground for planting

some 270,000 trees and shrubs. In addition to rude construction, workers built miles of drives, walks, and bridle paths, as well as more than twenty bridges and underpasses to achieve the separation of ways. They also erected several buildings and dozens of structures—including a Music Stand, rustic shelters, arbors, and boat landings—to serve the public. The cost of construction was staggering. The state legislation establishing the park had authorized spending a maximum of \$1,500,000 for construction, but that amount proved hopelessly inadequate. By 1859, costs totaled \$1,765,000—at which time only a part of the lower park had been completed and opened to the public. In 1861, the state legislature authorized the expenditure of an additional \$2,500,000, bringing the total amount allocated for building the park to \$4,000,000. By 1866, that figure had been exceeded by 50 percent: it cost significantly more to build the park than it had to assemble the land for it. By 1870, Olmsted estimated that constructing the park had cost New York City approximately \$8,900,000.²²

Building Central Park was especially expensive and controversial because it took place within the tumultuous political culture of New York in the 1850s. As New York City's Democratic Party grew in power, the state legislature, dominated by upstate Republicans, attempted to restrict the ability of the city to govern itself. A new city charter, enacted by the state legislature in 1857, cut Democratic Mayor Fernando Wood's term in half, forcing him to run for reelection in the midst of an economic recession. (As the charter writers undoubtedly hoped, Wood lost the election.) The charter, a patently antidemocratic document, also replaced the Municipal Police, whose members had been appointed by the mayor, with a Metropolitan Police force controlled by five state-appointed commissioners. The two police organizations, representing different cultures as well as executives, clashed on the steps of City Hall and a riot ensued. The new charter created several state-appointed commissions, including one to regulate the harbor and another to build Central Park.²³

The new Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, which was supposed to be a non-partisan body, appointed Olmsted Superintendent of Labor in September 1857, in large part because he was seen as acceptable—that is, because he was perceived to be non-political by Democratic as well as Republican board members.²⁴ A month after his appointment, as the effects of an economic panic in New York deepened, the city government withheld funding for the park, forcing the park commissioners to lay off the workforce. As the recession worsened, thousands of jobless workers descended upon the park, including one mob carrying a banner inscribed "Bread or Blood." Olmsted later recalled that to reach his office one morning he had to make his way through a crowd of 5,000 protesters.

Olmsted described how a candidate for reelection as a local magistrate addressed the crowd from a wagon: “He urged that those before him had a right to live; he assumed that they could only live through wages to be paid by the city; and to obtain these he advised that they should demand employment of me. If I should be backward in yielding it—here he held up a rope and pointed to a tree, and the crowd cheered.” To placate the unemployed, who marched on City Hall insisting on their right to work, in early November the city government authorized the park commission to hire 1,000 laborers. As there was not yet an approved design of the park at this time, the laborers worked at clearing the park and building a wall around it.²⁵

As Superintendent of Labor, Olmsted had to organize this workforce. His task was compounded by two realities. First, virtually every member of the park commission, while denouncing patronage, expected he would be able to provide jobs to friends and faithful party workers. Second, New York’s working class in the late 1850s was feeling dual pressures from industrialization, which increased work discipline, and a surplus of labor (the result of record levels of immigration), which depressed job opportunities and wages. Workers were fractious and attempted to protect their interest through rallies and strikes. Olmsted and the park commission determined to hire laborers as public employees and to regulate the work they performed closely, which conflicted with the expectations of many of the city’s laborers. In this, Olmsted was adopting management practices developed by the engineers who built canals, railroads, and other major public and private works in the United States. Olmsted organized the workers into teams of thirty to forty men, each with a foreman who was responsible for taking roll and preparing daily reports on the work accomplished. Eight general foremen supervised the foremen to ensure that all laborers were complying with park policies and Olmsted’s expectations of efficient work. Olmsted clearly was proud of his management of the park’s construction: in January 1858 he informed his father that he had “got the park into a capital discipline, a perfect system, working like a machine, 1000 men now at work.” Two years later, looking back on the initial months of construction, Olmsted explained to his friend Charles Loring Brace that in the weeks following the hiring of the 1,000 laborers in November 1857, he had the men “*economically* employed” and added that he “rigidly discharged any man who failed to work industriously & to behave in a quiet & orderly manner.” Although Olmsted conceded that there were several work stoppages because of strikes, he insisted that during the early years of construction “there has been the most perfect order, peace & good feeling preserved, notwithstanding the fact that the laborers are mainly from the poorest of what is generally considered the most dangerous class

of the great city's population.”²⁶

The cultural conflict that separated Olmsted's point of view from that of the park's workers extended to the political elite as well, with the result that Central Park often was under intense scrutiny by city and state government, all the more so as costs began to exceed the anticipated expenditure. In 1860, when the park commission sought approval for additional funds to complete construction, the state legislature appointed a Swiss engineer, Julius Kellersberger, to investigate the park's construction and management. Kellersberger had access to park commission records and made an independent and detailed inspection of the park's operations. Olmsted and the park commissioners must have been gratified, and relieved, when the report was completed and published. Kellersberger assured the legislature, and the public, that at Central Park the “works are carried on under efficient and proper supervision, and under a strict discipline; the best order and system prevails in the different offices as well as on the grounds, and in that respect there is no other public work in the United States to be compared with the Central Park.” He concluded by noting that the park contributed “as much honor to the taste, refinement, and wealth of the metropolis, as credit to its designer and executor.”²⁷

Managing Central Park—educating the public in the proper use of the new park, overseeing maintenance and ongoing improvements, and ensuring the public's safety—was, in Olmsted's estimation, equally important to design and superintendence of construction. Prior to construction of the park, a number of newspapers expressed what Olmsted termed the “fallacy of cowardly conservatism.” This was the belief that democracy was, ultimately, a decivilizing process that would establish the lowest common denominator in American political, social, and intellectual life. Any recreational or cultural institution open to the public would effectively be defined by the behavior of the rudest, least reputable members of society, with the result that the middle and upper classes would not frequent such places. The *New York Herald* gave voice to this opinion in 1857, when it argued against the expenditure of large sums of money to build Central Park. Contrasting two well known New Yorkers with a composite it called Sam the Five Pointer—a resident of the Five Points area of lower Manhattan, the city's most notorious slum—the *Herald* predicted that Sam would engage in the kind of loutish behavior that would make the park unappealing to all others: “He will run races with his new horse in the carriage way. He will knock any better dressed man down who remonstrates with him. He will talk and sing, and fill his share of the bench, and flirt with the nursery girls in his own coarse way. Now, we ask what chance have William B. Astor and Edward Everett against this fellow-citizen of

theirs? Can they and he enjoy the same place?" The *Herald* couldn't envision the workings of social democracy, and instead predicted that "the great Central Park, which has cost so much money and is to cost so much more, will be nothing but a huge bear-garden for the lowest denizens of the city." Olmsted must have resented the story from the *Herald* immensely: thirteen years later, he quoted it to demonstrate as unwarranted the fear of the park as a democratic institution.²⁸

Olmsted realized that public safety and policing of the park were the "most vulnerable point in the undertaking," and in February 1858 he assumed responsibility for training and administering a force of keepers to maintain order. Olmsted envisioned that the principal responsibility of the keepers, like that of the metropolitan police who patrolled London's West End parks, would be to educate the public in the park's proper use. He shaped the keepers into a highly effective force, and their impact on park visitors was admirable. One writer told of encountering in the park one of the city's most notorious saloonkeepers; he had come there one Sunday to visit former customers, who found the park more attractive than the bar. Olmsted noted that the park exercised "a distinctly harmonizing and refining influence over the most unfortunate and lawless classes of the city—an influence favorable to courtesy, self-control, and temperance." The fears of social conservatives notwithstanding, the park was a safe, well-ordered landscape.²⁹

The keepers were essential to Olmsted's vision of the park as a democratic social space. In August 1858 he described the park as "a democratic development of the highest significance & on the strength of which . . . much of the progress of art & esthetic culture in this country is dependent." Two years later he urged Unitarian minister Henry W. Bellows to write an article about Central Park. Experience since the park's opening in the fall of 1859 refuted "certain political and social fallacies commonly entertained," Olmsted wrote Bellows, and justified "the highest hopes which have been entertained of its moral influence." Bellows did write the article Olmsted suggested, which was published in the April 1861 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*. Describing Central Park as "a royal work, undertaken and achieved by the Democracy," Bellows, like Olmsted, found in the park's success a source of optimism for the future of the nation's democratic institutions. Central Park was, he asserted, "the most striking evidence of the sovereignty of the people yet afforded in the history of free institutions,—the best answer yet given to the doubts and fears which have frowned on the theory of self-government,—the first grand proof that the people do not mean to give up the advantages and victories of aristocratic governments, in maintaining a popular one." Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the park, Bellows concluded, was in promoting the development of "new and almost incredible tastes, aptitudes, capacities, and powers in the

people themselves.”³⁰

Olmsted placed such importance on the park as a democratic institution because he saw it as the one place in a city stratified by class, race, and ethnicity that welcomed all residents. In 1859, when describing his vision of the park, he insisted that it would be the primary source of recreation to residents “of all classes.” The park was “intended to furnish healthful recreation for the poor and the rich, the young and the old, the vicious and the virtuous.” These words anticipate Olmsted’s 1870 statement of the park as the one place in the modern city that embraced all of its residents. Speaking at the Lowell Institute and urging citizens of Boston to establish a large park in their community, he remarked that Central Park and Prospect Park, in Brooklyn, were the only places in those respective cities where “you will find a body of Christians coming together, and with an evident glee in the prospect of coming together, all classes largely represented, with a common purpose, not at all intellectual, competitive with none, disposing to jealousy and spiritual or intellectual pride toward none, each individual adding by his mere presence to the pleasure of all others, all helping to the greater happiness of each. You may thus often see vast numbers of persons brought closely together, poor and rich, young and old, Jew and Gentile.”³¹

Olmsted resigned from his position on the park in the spring of 1861, when he became general secretary of the United States Sanitary Commission, a private organization that aided Union soldiers during the American Civil War. He then spent two years in California managing a gold mining operation before returning to New York City in late 1865. Although he and Vaux were appointed consulting landscape architects for Central Park, they had no responsibility for construction, maintenance, and use of the park. The board of commissioners paid little, if any, attention to Olmsted and Vaux’s views on a number of important decisions regarding the park, including a series of monumental gateways proposed by architect Richard Morris Hunt, or his plans to erect a museum for the New-York Historical Society in the park, all which they opposed as threats to the integrity of the landscape. Even when the commissioners instructed them to prepare plans for a zoological garden, which Olmsted and Vaux located at Manhattan Square, across Eighth Avenue from the park, comptroller Andrew H. Green prevented the designers from presenting their plan to the full board. Only for a brief period after the fall of the Tweed “ring” in late 1871 did Olmsted again have authority over the park, but even then politics and the city’s straitened financial condition severely restricted what he was able to accomplish.³²

Although Olmsted regretted that politics compromised his and Vaux’s design for the park, he nevertheless took great pride in what they had been able to

accomplish. He described the park as the key to the “increased value of life in this city” and attributed to it the exponential residential and institutional growth on its periphery. The park stimulated the construction of rows of townhouses in the blocks just to its south in the 1850s. In succeeding years, new development along Fifth and Eighth avenues fulfilled Olmsted and Vaux’s prediction, in the text accompanying the Greensward plan, that in twenty years the park would be surrounded by tall buildings. As this development took place, the higher valuations of land and buildings in the blocks surrounding the park generated more tax revenue than the cost of land acquisition and construction.³³

Central Park was a creative response to New York City’s dramatic growth in the years after 1845. Olmsted and Vaux designed its curvilinear paths and naturalistic landscape to stand in striking contrast to the straight lines and sharp angles of the expanding city. Through boundary plantings, the transverse roads, and the complete separation of traffic they implemented in the park, Olmsted and Vaux minimized the degree to which the city would intrude upon the humanly created landscape. But the park was, and remains, an urban institution, conceived not as a withdrawal from or repudiation of the complexities of metropolitan life but as part of what Olmsted later characterized as the complex physical fabric and the “general municipal economy of a great City.”³⁴

Central Park has served New York remarkably well for 150 years—so well, in fact, that it seems always to have been there, a natural landscape wisely preserved from development as the built area of the city swept northward on Manhattan Island. Although the park is completely a humanly created landscape, it is nevertheless difficult to imagine what life would be like in New York without Central Park. The great American regionalist Lewis Mumford grew up on Manhattan’s Upper West Side in the early twentieth century. The neighborhood of his youth was framed by Central Park to the east and Riverside Park to the west, two of Olmsted and Vaux’s landmark parks, open spaces that provided welcome relief from the densely-built streets. Years later Mumford recalled, “I hate to think how depressing the total effect [of my childhood landscape] would have been had not Central Park and Riverside Park been there to gladden my eyes and beckon my legs to a ramble.”³⁵

The 150th anniversary of Olmsted and Vaux’s Greensward Plan for Central Park is indeed an occasion worth celebrating. The success of the park inspired the creation of public recreational grounds in numerous other American cities throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and launched what would become the profession of landscape architecture in the United States. But in some ways it is even more significant that Central Park represents a dramatic expansion

of municipal responsibility and power. Although the park was constructed and administered during its first thirteen years by a state-appointed commission—to prevent jobs from becoming patronage positions for the city’s Democratic leaders—its creation was an assertion that the health and welfare of the urban population was a legitimate concern for the municipal corporation. The millions of visitors who, like Mumford, have visited the park over the last century and a half are beneficiaries of this enlarged vision of the responsibilities of city government and of the model of stewardship the park and the Greensward design represent.³⁶

Two landscapes designed by Olmsted and Vaux are open to the public in Orange County—Downing Park in Newburgh and Hillside Cemetery in Middletown.

Notes

1. Frederick Law Olmsted, “Statistical Report of the Landscape Architect, 31st December 1873, Forming Part of Appendix L of the Third General Report of the Department,” in New York City, Department of Public Parks, *Third Annual Report* (New York, 1875), pp. 46-47; Clarence C. Cook, *A Description of the New York Central Park* (New York, 1869), p. 110; George E. Waring to F. L. Olmsted, Oct. 17, 1859, in Frederick Law Olmsted Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Hereafter cited as Olmsted Papers.
2. This paragraph is describing the “Panorama of Manhattan Island, City of New York and Environs . . . Drawn from Nature and on Stone by John Bornet,” 1854, Eno Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallace Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York City.
3. Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca, 1992), pp. 59-91.
4. Egbert L. Viele, “Report of Egbert L. Viele, Engineer-in-Chief,” in New York City, Board of Aldermen, *Documents* 24 (1857), doc. 5, Jan. 19, 1857, p. 12; Olmsted, “Description of the Central Park” [Jan. 1859], in *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, vol. 3, Creating Central Park, 1857-1861*, ed. Charles E. Beveridge and David Schuyler (Baltimore, 1983), pp. 205-12; Olmsted, “Passages in the Life of an Unpractical Man,” *ibid.*, p. 90.
5. [Frederick Law Olmsted], *Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England*, ed. Charles C. McLaughlin (1852; reprint ed., Amherst, Mass., 2002), p. 145; Olmsted to the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, May 31, 1858, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 196.
6. Vaux to Clarence Cook, June 6, 1865, Olmsted Papers; Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and Theodora Kimball, eds., *Frederick Law Olmsted, Landscape Architect, 1822-1903 (Forty Years of Landscape Architecture)*, 2 vols. (New York, 1922-28), 2: 95.
7. *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 178n2; Olmsted and Vaux, “Description of a Plan for the Improvement of the Central Park, ‘Greensward,’” in *ibid.*, pp. 120-22; Olmsted to William Robinson, May 17, 1872, Olmsted Papers; Olmsted, “Description of the Central Park,” pp. 212-13; Olmsted to the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, May 31, 1858, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 196. In the text accompanying the Greensward plan Olmsted and Vaux estimated that the city had to acquire 17,000 lots in assembling the land for the park. Clarence Cook, by contrast, stated that the commissioners of estimate and assessment had to evaluate the claims of owners of 7,500 lots. Olmsted and Vaux, “Greensward,” p. 120; Cook, *Description of the New York Central Park*, p. 21.

8. Historians who have analyzed the competition for the design of Central Park include Ian Stewart, "Politics and the Park: The Fight for Central Park," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 61 (July-Oct. 1977): 135-49; David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore, 1986), pp. 83-84, 210-17; Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, pp. 95-120; and Sara Cedar Miller, *Central Park: An American Masterpiece* (New York, 2003), pp. 81-88.
9. *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 23-24; Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 121-22; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," p. 216; Cook, *Description of the New York Central Park*, pp. 35-36.
10. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 127-29; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," p. 214.
11. Olmsted and Vaux to Henry G. Stebbins, Jan. 1872, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Supplemental Series 1: Writings on Public Parks, Parkways, and Park Systems*, ed. Charles E. Beveridge and Carolyn F. Hoffman (Baltimore, 1997), p. 250; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," pp. 212-13; Olmsted to the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 196; [William J. Stillman], "Sketchings. Central Park," *Crayon* 5 (July 1858): 210.
12. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 121-22, 124, 129-30. See also Charles E. Beveridge and Paul Rocheleau, *Frederick Law Olmsted: Designing the American Landscape* (New York, 1995); Charles E. Beveridge, "Frederick Law Olmsted's Theory of Landscape Design," *Nineteenth Century* 3 (Summer 1977): 38-43; and Susanna S. Zetzel, "The Garden in the Machine: The Construction of Nature in Olmsted's Central Park," *Prospects* 14 (1989): 291-339.
13. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 125-26.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Elizabeth Milroy, "The Public Career of Emma Stebbins: Works in Marble," *Archives of American Art Journal* 33, no. 3 (1993): 2-12; *idem.*, "Works in Bronze," *ibid.*, 34, no. 1 (1994): 2-13.
16. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 129-30; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," p. 215. Olmsted and Vaux to Henry G. Stebbins, Feb. 1872, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Supplemental Series 1: 255-73*.
17. Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," *Journal of Social Science* 3 (1871): 23; Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 129-30; Olmsted, "Park" [1861], in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 354-55; Olmsted to Ignaz Pilat, Sept. 26, 1863, Olmsted Papers; "Central Park," *Scribner's Monthly* 6 (Oct. 1873): 683.
18. Olmsted and Vaux, "Preliminary Report to the Commissioners for Laying Out a Park in Brooklyn, New York: Being a Consideration of Circumstances of Site and Other Conditions Affecting the Design of Public Pleasure Grounds" (1866), in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted, Supplemental Series 1*, pp. 90-91; Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," p. 23; Olmsted, "Park," pp. 354-55; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," pp. 212-13; Cook, *Description of the New York Central Park*, p. 81.
19. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," pp. 126-27; Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," pp. 213-14; Olmsted and Vaux, "Preliminary Report to the Commissioners for Laying Out a Park in Brooklyn," p. 92.
20. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," p. 131; Olmsted, "Park," p. 355.
21. Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," p. 119.
22. Olmsted, "Statistical Report of the Fourth Annual Report of the Landscape Architect, 31st December 1873," pp. 46-47; Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, *Fourth Annual Report* (New York, 1861), p. 26; *idem.*, *Sixth Annual Report* (New York, 1863), pp. 6-7; *idem.*, *Fifth Annual Report* (New York, 1862), p. 7; Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, Minutes, Aug. 5, 1859; Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, pp. 150-51.

23. For the Charter of 1857 see Edward K. Spann, *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840-1857* (New York, 1981), pp. 384-97.
24. Olmsted quickly realized that the new charter had not removed the park from politics; it gave preferment to one political group over another. He later described the events of 1857 as a "storm of reform" that changed little and quickly subsided. With evident cynicism he wrote in 1878: "There is a power which ordinarily lies ineffective back of all the political vices of our cities. At times it is stirred with shame, disgust and indignation; organizes itself and makes a loud demand for reform. The politicians out of office take advantage of the opportunity not only to secure the removal of those who have been in office but to make them as they go forth serve the purpose of scape goats. A few changes of form and method are made and the citizens are reconciled to a system under which the old vices are cherished only more warmly than before." Olmsted, "Passages in the Life of an Unpractical Man," Olmsted Papers.
25. Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, Minutes, Aug. 27, 1857; Olmsted to John Hull Olmsted, Sept. 11, 1857, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted* 3: 79-81; Olmsted to Charles Loring Brace, Dec. 8, 1860, *ibid.*, pp. 286-87; Olmsted, "Passages in the Life of an Unpractical Man," pp. 85-87; Olmsted, "Influence," undated manuscript, Olmsted Papers.
26. Rosenzweig and Blackmar, *The Park and the People*, pp. 150-58; J. M. Murphy, et al., "Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Examine into Condition, Affairs, and Progress of the New York Central Park," in Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, *Fourth Annual Report* (New York, 1861), pp. 86-98, 121-22; Olmsted to John Olmsted, Jan. 14, 1858, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 113-14; Olmsted to Charles Loring Brace, Dec. 8, 1860, *ibid.*, pp. 286-87. Although historians such as Morton Keller and Stephen Skowronek focus on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century eras, many of the organizational tendencies they describe were evident, in perhaps rudimentary form, in the park's construction and management. See Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977) and Skowronek, *Building a New American Nation State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982).
27. J. M. Murphy, et al., "Report of the Special Committee," pp. 121-22.
28. Olmsted to James T. Fields, Oct. 21, 1860, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 3: 269-74; "The Central Park and other City Improvements," *New York Herald*, Sept. 6, 1857; Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," p. 28.
29. Olmsted, "Report to the Board of Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks, Relative to the Police Force of the Department," in New York City, Board of Commissioners of the Department of Public Parks, *Documents*, doc. 41, Oct. 24, 1872 (New York, 1872), pp. 2-3; David Schuyler and Jane Turner Censer, eds., *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, vol. 6, *The Years of Olmsted*, Vaux & Company, 1865-1874 (Baltimore and London, 1992), pp. 41-43.
30. Olmsted to Parke Godwin, Aug. 1, 1858, Bryant-Godwin Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Rare Book & Manuscripts Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, New York City; Olmsted to H. W. Bellows, Oct. 30, 1860, Bellows Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Bellows, "Cities and Parks: With Special Reference to the New York Central Park," *Atlantic Monthly* 7 (April 1861): 416-29.
31. Olmsted, "Description of the Central Park," pp. 212-13; Olmsted, "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns," p. 18.
32. *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 6: 3-5, 18-19, 37-45.
33. Olmsted to Henry G. Stebbins, Feb. 1872, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, *Supplemental Series* 1: 272; Olmsted and Vaux, "Greensward," p. 120. See also Charles Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown: An Illustrated History* (Boston, 1976).
34. Olmsted, Vaux & Company to the Chairman of the Committee on Plans of the Park Commission of Philadelphia, Dec. 4, 1867, in *Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 6: 232;
35. Lewis Mumford, *Sketches from Life* (New York, 1982), p. 10.

36. For discussions of the influence of Central Park on other cities see Schuyler, *New Urban Landscape*, pp. 101-46; Daniel Bluestone, *Constructing Chicago* (New Haven, 1991), pp. 36-61; Cynthia Zaitzevsky, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982); and Francis R. Kowsky, "Municipal Parks and City Planning: Frederick Law Olmsted's Buffalo Park and Parkway System," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 46 (March 1987): 49-64.



Fig. 4: Sunnyside from Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1852), Vol. II, p. 193

“To Loiter about the Ruined Castle”: Washington Irving’s Gothic Inspiration

Kerry Dean Carso

Washington Irving (1783-1859) brought acclaim to American literature through his many books and short stories, and distinction to American architecture through the alterations to his house, Sunnyside, on the Hudson River in Tarrytown. Irving’s rich imagination drew inspiration from a variety of sources for his architectural creation. The most obvious influence is American colonial architecture, especially the Dutch heritage of the Hudson Valley.¹ Less understood but equally important is Irving’s conception of the medieval; in fact, he called Sunnyside “a perversion of the Gothic.”² Irving enhanced his sense of the Gothic past through his reading of both Gothic novels and historical romances, and applied this sensibility to his architectural tastes. In redesigning Sunnyside, Irving was imitating a man he much admired for both his literary and architectural endeavors, Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832). The author of numerous historical romances, Scott often infused his novels with themes from earlier Gothic writers, such as Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823).³ At Sunnyside, Irving borrowed architectural elements from Scott’s baronial house, Abbotsford, designed by William Atkinson (1812-15; enlarged 1819); these recycled features were both literal (in the case of ivy clippings from Scotland) and conceptual (in the massing and details). The connection to Scott was palpable for visitors to Sunnyside: one writer commented, “A ramble at Sunnyside is equal to a pilgrimage to Abbotsford.”⁴ In order to understand the complexity of the cultural exchange between past and present that Irving achieved, we must understand the Gothic context of both his literary and architectural endeavors. An interdisciplinary analysis of Irving’s literature and architectural design reveals his debt to both Gothic and Dutch traditions.

Scott-related sites were extremely popular tourist destinations in the nineteenth century. American historian Francis Parkman visited the border country—and Abbotsford, Melrose Abbey, and Dryburgh Abbey in particular—in 1844. In Edinburgh, Parkman wrote, “Sir Walter Scott is everywhere. His

name is in everybody's lips, and associates itself with every spot around this place. I ask the name of such a street—such a mountain, or island, or cottage, or piece of woods—the words of the reply have been familiar to me as my own name for the last six years.”⁵ Visits to literary shrines were important tourist activities. In England, of course, there was an increasing interest in the history of the nation, while, at the same time, religion was on the wane. As literary critic Emily Jane Cohen has written, “The homage paid to the defunct writer would be the equivalent of the late medieval pilgrimage.”⁶

Unlike the many Americans who visited Scotland after Scott's death, Irving had the privilege of actually meeting Scott. In 1817, after he had published Diedrich Knickerbocker's *A History of New York* (1809), but before he published his first fictional foray, *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819-1820), Washington Irving stopped by Abbotsford on his way to Melrose Abbey. Scott greeted him warmly and invited Irving to stay for a while. The occasion turned into a visit of several days and resulted in Irving's essay “Abbotsford,” published in 1835.⁷ At the time, Abbotsford and other points of interest associated with Scott's writings had become popular tourist spots. During Irving's visit, two tourists arrived to visit Scott; after they departed, Scott commented on “the great influx of English travellers, which . . . had inundated Scotland.” Irving reminded him that it was his own writings that drew the curious to the ruins and castles of Scotland.⁸

Irving delighted in visiting ruins himself. On his first day at Abbotsford, Scott's young son, Charles, accompanied Irving to Melrose Abbey (fig. 1), which was near Abbotsford and which had been featured in Scott's poem *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805). A place with many romantic associations, Melrose Abbey was a must-see destination for Irving. Through his literary persona Geoffrey Crayon, Irving had written of a longing “to tread, as it were, in the footsteps of antiquity—to loiter about the ruined castle—to meditate on the falling tower. . .”⁹ Visiting the abbey was just such an opportunity, and Irving relished it. When they arrived, Charles introduced Irving to the caretaker, Johnny Bower, who cited lines from Scott's poem as he took Irving on a tour of the ruins. Irving noted that *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* had “become interwoven with [the caretaker's] whole existence” so much so that Bower had merged his own identity with those of Scott's characters, an effect resulting from Bower's “constantly living among the ruins of Melrose Abbey.”¹⁰

This merging of fact with fiction, of reality with romance, was part of the tourist experience. Indeed, it was common for nineteenth-century travelers to carry not only their travel guides, but also the fiction relevant to each attraction. When visiting the ruins of Kenilworth, for instance, Prince Puckler-Muskau



Fig. 1: Melrose Abbey, from William Beattie, *Scotland Illustrated* (London, G. Virtue, 1838)

brought along Scott's novel *Kenilworth* (1821): "With Sir Walter Scott's captivating book in my hand I wandered amid these ruins, which call up such varied feelings..."¹¹ When Henry Ward Beecher visited *Kenilworth*, suddenly the scenes from Scott's novel rushed to mind: "But as I sat in a room, upon a fallen stone, one incident after another from the novel, and from history, came to me, one after another, until I seemed to be visiting an old and familiar place."¹² It is in these circumstances that Gothic literature takes on a didactic quality, teaching its readers how to react to and experience Gothic architecture. For example, Johnny Bower told Irving that because Scott wrote in his poem that the best time to view the Abbey was by moonlight, some visitors insisted on seeing it at night.

While at Abbotsford, Irving's excitement at his proximity to "the mighty minstrel of the North" kept him awake at night: "the idea of being under the roof of Scott, in the very centre of that region which had for some time past, been the favorite scene of romantic fiction . . . nearly drove sleep from my pillow," Irving wrote. He was an admirer of Scott's literature, and his essay ends with Irving's unbridled admiration for the novelist, whose works he always eagerly anticipated.

But it was not just his literary efforts that Irving admired; it was also his lifestyle and architectural endeavors at Abbotsford. During Irving's visit, Scott was renovating his home, changing it from a "snug gentleman's cottage" into a "huge baronial pile." Irving noted that Scott's process of architectural invention

¹¹"To Loiter about the Ruined Castle": Washington Irving's Gothic Inspiration

paralleled the great man's writing method, stating that Scott "pleased himself with picturing out his future residence as he would one of the fanciful creations of his own romances."¹³ Scattered about the grounds were the fragments of Melrose Abbey that Scott was incorporating into Abbotsford. In so doing, Scott was blending into his home not only the medieval past, but also the tangible materials out of which his own fiction sprang.

Published along with "Abbotsford" in *The Crayon Miscellany* was Irving's essay "Newstead Abbey," about his visit to poet Lord Byron's ancestral home. It tells us a great deal about Irving's Gothic sensibility. He visited Newstead Abbey for the first time in 1831; in January 1832, he returned to spend three weeks there. Henry II founded the abbey in the twelfth century; under Henry VIII, it was given to Byron's ancestor, Sir John Byron, who converted it into a dwelling. Byron sold it to his schoolmate, Colonel Wildman, who restored it. Irving begins his essay with the history of the dwelling and its eccentric owners, including Byron's great uncle and Byron himself, who, in true Gothic fashion, dug up the bones of the former residents (the Newstead monks) and kept them about the house.

As evidenced by Byron's strange act of disinterment, the past weighed heavily upon the abbey, especially in Irving's mind, but the past is constantly mingled with Irving's fertile imagination. The abbey appeals to Irving because it is "haunted by monkish, and feudal, and poetical associations," a heady mix for a romantic sensibility. As he wanders about, he ruminates on the fact that monks once treaded the quadrangle. He delights in fantasizing about the past, about the people depicted in the abbey's portraits, people who used to inhabit the dwelling. Irving's chamber is an "imaginary realm" to him, where he weaves "a thousand fancies." Here he would "conjure up fictions of the brain." Not at all concerned with his current hosts, as he himself asserts, Irving fixates on both the ancient architecture and Lord Byron's romantic life. He even visits nearby Annesley Hall to see the place where Byron fell in love with Mary Ann Chaworth.

Irving believes that the abbey was a source of inspiration for the poet, as it "addressed itself to his poetical imagination." As Irving explores the place, he quotes Byron's poetry, especially Byron's own poems about the abbey, "Lines on Leaving Newstead Abbey" and "Elegy on Newstead Abbey." Once again, literature and the experience of authentic Gothic architecture go hand-in-hand for Irving. And fiction plays an equally important role in Irving's experience of the countryside surrounding Newstead Abbey. It is located in the heart of Robin Hood country, near Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire. Irving tells us that as a child, he loved to read about the outlaw. During his visit, Irving goes to the forest to see the locations most associated with the Robin Hood legend. He communes with

the past in the Sherwood villages, where “every thing has a quaint and antiquated air.”¹⁴ Every experience Irving has at the abbey and in the surrounding area is shrouded in fiction and history, and he revels in it all.

Irving had been fascinated with stories, such as Robin Hood’s, since his youth. In “The Author’s Account of Himself,” from *The Sketch-Book*, Irving’s alter ego, Geoffrey Crayon, writes that he actively sought out the history and fables of the countryside: “I knew every spot where a murder or a robbery had been committed, or a ghost seen.”¹⁵ From Irving’s youthful journals, which chronicle his first European visit between 1804 and 1806, we learn that he was a Gothic aficionado, often mentioning Radcliffe’s works. While traveling through the French countryside in 1804, Irving is reminded of Radcliffe’s landscape descriptions. He passes “an old Castle in a very ruinous state” with one habitable wing and is reminded of the Chateau of M. St. Aubert from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), writing, “this would have formed a fine picture for her [Radcliffe’s] talents to work upon.”¹⁶ In October 1804, Irving lent his copy of Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1791) to a friend, who was so interested “that he read it all the road & had nearly broken his head against several walls & trees which he encountered.”¹⁷ From his journals, one senses that Irving was often contemplating the Gothic novels he had read, comparing Radcliffe’s scenery to that which he saw, and Radcliffe’s fictional Gothic edifices to the buildings he examined. When visiting Haddon Hall, an English baronial mansion, Irving writes that “Mrs. Radcliff [sic] is said to have taken the idea of the Castle of Udolpho from this old hall & this singular box may have given the idea of her mysterious picture,” referring to the wax figure hidden behind a curtain in Udolpho castle.¹⁸

Irving’s sketch on a visit to Westminster Abbey likewise relies on Gothic novel conventions. Crayon, the narrator, delights in the “mournful magnificence of the old pile.” Upon crossing the threshold, it “seemed like stepping back into the regions of antiquity.” Irving’s description of Crayon’s entrance into the abbey reads like a Gothic romance. After passing through a “vaulted passage” that looked “almost subterranean,” he caught sight of “an old verger, in his black gown, moving along their shadowy vaults, and seeming like a specter from one of the neighboring tombs.” The sketch is a melancholy musing on mortality and the heaviness of the past. The scale of the edifice dwarfs the viewer, who feels a sense of sublime awe, as articulated by Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). The narrator does not fail to think of Scott, who is not explicitly named, but whose chivalric romances are brought to the reader’s mind when Crayon describes the sepulchre of a crusader in the abbey.¹⁹

By his second visit to Europe between 1815 and 1832, Irving's reading habits had evolved, and this time he was everywhere reminded of Scott's works, which had superseded Radcliffe's in popularity by that time. In August 1817, Irving traveled up the coast of Scotland en route to Edinburgh, following a path similar to that of the abbess in Scott's *Marmion* (1808). Such an occurrence does not pass unnoticed in Irving's letter to his brother, in which he quotes Scott's poem and even notes the location of Constance de Beverley's trial and execution.²⁰ In a letter from 1815, Irving reports that he and a friend have gone to Kenilworth and Warwick castles. Kenilworth is the subject of Scott's novel of the same name, published after Irving's visit, in 1821. The castle dates from 1120, and had stood in ruins since the time of Cromwell. About Kenilworth, Irving writes that anyone who has seen "this magnificent wreck of feudal grandeur can never forget it. It surpassed all my anticipations, and has a proud grandeur even in its ruins..." He is equally impressed with Warwick, and even indulges in some Gothic daydreaming there, declaring "It is sufficient to say that when loitering within its vast court, surrounded by immense towers, long stretching battlements and lofty keeps, all mantled with ivy and stained by time, you may almost realize the dreams of chivalry and romance, and fancy yourself back into the days of tilts and tourneys." When seeing a young woman at a tower window, Irving humorously imagines her to be a damsel in distress trapped in the "dark and dismal tower by some 'Grim baron,'" a scenario strikingly reminiscent of one of Radcliffe's plots. Irving's goal at Warwick was to "forget the present in the past," and he mines the imagery of Gothic novels and historical romances to do so.²¹

The influence of the Gothic seeped into Irving's fictional writings as well. His best-known Gothic story is "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," the tale of Ichabod Crane's moonlit adventure with the Headless Horseman.²² And Irving takes up a favorite Gothic subject in the final section of his *Tales of a Traveller* (1824). Part III, "The Italian Banditti," is a series of interlocking sketches, bringing the reader inside the world of Italy's morally bereft robbers. The wild, romantic landscape is a major element in the stories. At one point, the painter (the narrator of "The Painter's Adventure," "The Story of the Bandit Chieftain," and "The Story of the Young Robber") is asked by the chieftain to draw his likeness. The painter is excited at the rare prospect. He remembers that seventeenth-century Italian artist Salvator Rosa had lived among the banditti of Calabria (a popular myth about the artist) and "had filled his mind with the savage scenery and savage associates." The painter takes up his pencil "with enthusiasm." When he looks at the scenery, he is reminded of Rosa. Irving has a fine eye for the wild landscape of Italy and describes in picturesque detail the banditti who lurk in the mountains. Here he is

drawing upon one of Radcliffe's favorite subjects and elaborating on it. He takes us behind the scenes of bandit life, chronicling their humanity. Besides the banditti elements and the sexual threat to female virginity (in "The Story of the Young Robber"), the stories are not Gothic, per se, because they lack the intrusion of the supernatural.

This is not the case in Irving's "The Adventure of the German Student," also in *Tales of a Traveller*. In this story, an "unhealthy appetite" for "decayed literature" causes the German student's melancholy. "He was, in a manner, a literary goul, feeding in the charnel house of decayed literature," the narrator tells us. The setting is Revolutionary Paris, the accoutrements of which (including the guillotine) serve to frighten the student on his rambles through the city. The student meets a woman he finds in the pouring rain by the guillotine. He leaves her alone in his apartment; upon his return, he finds her "lying with her head hanging over the bed, and one arm thrown over it," a posture eerily reminiscent of the female figure in Henry Fuseli's Gothic painting *The Nightmare* (1781).²³ In a Gothic twist, it turns out the woman was guillotined just the night before. Upon undoing her neck band, the student watches as her head rolls onto the floor. The student ends up in a madhouse. In "The Adventure of the German Student," Irving once again turns to the wealth of his Gothic knowledge.

One interpretation of Irving's work that is decidedly Gothic is that of John Quidor (1801-1881).²⁴ A relatively unknown painter in his time, Quidor specialized in literary subjects, and Irving's works in particular. His painting *The Money Diggers* (1832) (fig. 2) is based on Irving's "Wolfert Webber, Or Golden Dreams" and "The Adventure of the Black Fisherman" from *Tales of a Traveller*. Wolfert Webber, an impecunious Dutch burgher in old Manhattan eager to rise above his financial misfortune, becomes obsessed with the legends of buried treasure in the area. Wolfert, Doctor Knipperhausen (Wolfert's black magic-practicing physician), and Sam (the black fisherman of the story's title) attempt to dig up some of the booty buried in the earth by pirates years before. A witness to the scene might have "mistaken the little doctor for some foul magician, busied in his incantations, and the grizzly headed negro for



Fig. 2: John Quidor's *The Money Diggers*, 1832



Fig. 3: John Quidor's *Ichabod Crane Pursued by the Headless Horseman*, 1858

some swart goblin, obedient to his commands.”²⁵ Their midnight adventure climaxes when a supposedly deceased buccaneer appears, leering at them from the cliff above and causing chaos to break out. This is the scene that Quidor chooses to illustrate. The story certainly contains Gothic elements—intrigue, spectral appearances, ruined buildings, necromancy—but the tale is

told in a humorous tone that pokes fun at Wolfert's incredulity. However, Quidor's interpretation is more seriously Gothic than his source. As Bryan Wolf has argued, Quidor takes Irving's work and transforms it into “a more gothic exploration, however burlesque, of subterranean and unknown forces.”²⁶ According to Wolf, the gaping hole in the center of the composition is the Gothic underworld, representing the character's irrational fears. The space of the painting is claustrophobic; all around the figures are grotesquely twisted, leafless trees, a mysterious moonlit landscape, and inky darkness.

Equally Gothic is Quidor's interpretation of Irving's “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (fig. 3), entitled *Ichabod Crane Pursued by the Headless Horseman* (1858). Once again, Quidor chooses to illustrate the story's most dramatic point, when Ichabod flies through the forest on his emaciated steed, Gunpowder, pursued by the “Gallop[ing] Hessian.” In Quidor's painting, Ichabod and Gunpowder are diminutive compared to the overwhelmingly dark and mysterious landscape encircling them. The composition draws attention to the frightened figure on horseback chased through the primeval forest.²⁷ The small scale of the figures compared to the vast web of trees in the background highlight the exaggerated sense of horror that Quidor infuses into his source. Indeed, as David Sokol has shown, Quidor reconstructs Irving's works, creating imaginative paintings that in their intensity go beyond his sources.²⁸ Quidor gothicizes Irving's story, creating an image pulsating with horror.

When Irving returned to the United States after seventeen years in Europe, he decided to settle on the banks of the Hudson. In 1835, he purchased an old Dutch farmhouse in Tarrytown that had belonged to the Van Tassel family (whom Irving had immortalized in “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”). The original house

on the site, dating to 1656 (according to Irving), was the residence of Wolfert Acker, a privy councilor to Peter Stuyvesant. This Dutch house was burned during the Revolution; the house that replaced it, known as the Van Tassel Cottage, was built in the 1780s. Irving engaged his friend George Harvey, a painter of Hudson River landscapes, as the architect, and the two collaborated on the renovation between 1835 and 1837 (fig. 4, page 22). The original structure was retained, but Harvey and Irving heightened the walls, enlarged the west window, added dormers, rebuilt the chimney, and added a new wing and veranda on the river side. The renovations included the addition of crow-stepped parapets to the gables and an arcaded entrance pavilion forming a porch. The whole creates an extremely Romantic effect; the building is asymmetrical through the addition of wings, and features an irregular roofline, created by the crow-stepped gables; weathervanes; clustered chimneystacks; and a cupola with spire and dormers. It is low to the ground and harmonizes with nature with its vine-covered walls and surrounding trees. Irving and Harvey added a tower with an Oriental flair (nicknamed the “Pagoda”) to Sunnyside’s northeast corner in 1847, after Irving’s four-year sojourn in Spain. Although the tower’s function was mundane (it contained a laundry, store rooms, pantries, and servants’ rooms), the “Pagoda” further Romanticized what was already an eclectic concoction.²⁹

Irving’s description of Sunnyside as “a perversion of the Gothic” is an accurate description, given its diverse sources (fig. 5). Indeed, Sunnyside is an amalgamation of styles, including the Hudson Valley’s colonial Dutch architecture, evident in the house’s crow-stepped gables.³⁰ In Dutch colonial America, the crow-stepped gable was a feature prevalent in urban architecture. Curiously, Irving chose an urban architectural element for his Hudson Valley home. As Wayne Franklin has shown, illustrations of urban Dutch-influenced houses in New York City appeared in *The New-York Mirror* in a series of articles illustrated by Alexander Jackson Davis in the early 1830s.³¹ Irving repeatedly emphasized the Dutch nature of his house; it is clear from his descriptions of Sunnyside that its Dutch aspect was of great importance to him. Contemporaries noted the varied inspiration of Irving’s creation. A critic in *The Corsair* praised Sunnyside as “a combination of the old fashioned Dutch North-river mansion, with the modern English cottage.”³²

The overall feeling of the house is Picturesque, and its interior architectural spaces are quite Gothic, in the novelistic sense, a fact that was not lost on contemporary observers. Nathaniel Parker Willis reported that Sunnyside was “not wholly comprehensible,” much like the architectural space of the castle of Udolpho, in which passages lead to nowhere and secret doors abound.³³ Irving had described a similar Gothic house earlier, in *The Sketch-Book*, when he writes about the

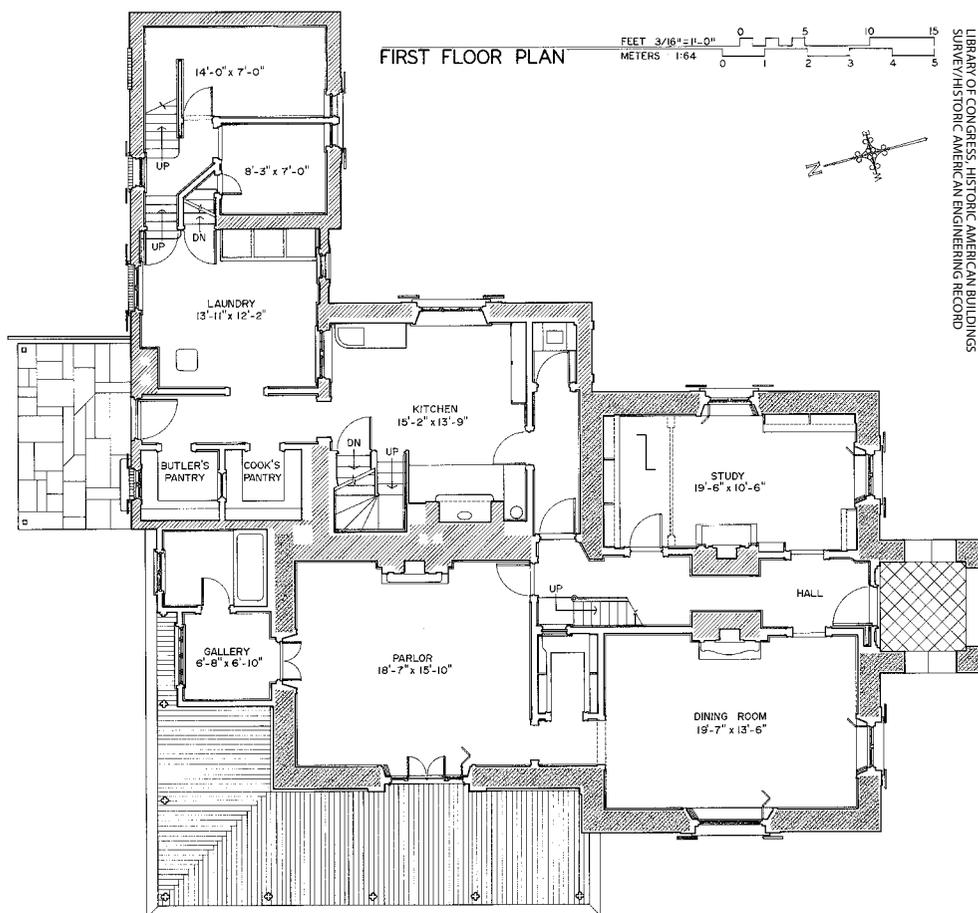


Fig. 5: Washington Irving and George Harvey, Sunnyside, 1835-37, Tarrytown

typical Englishman in the essay “John Bull.” Bull’s house, of course, is a fictional composite of what Irving perceives as the representative English manor house:

His family mansion is an old castellated manor house, gray with age, and of a most venerable though weather-beaten appearance. It has been built upon no regular plan, but is a vast accumulation of parts, erected in various tastes and ages . . . Like all relics of that style [Saxon architecture], it is full of obscure passages, intricate mazes, and dusky chambers . . . Additions have been made to the original edifice from time to time, and great alterations have taken place; towers and battlements have been erected during wars and tumults, wings built in time of peace . . . until it has become one of the most spacious, rambling tenements imaginable. ³⁴

Sunnyside is like John Bull’s house in many ways. It has the appearance of “accumulation” in its synthesis of various styles. As an addition to the main house, the “Pagoda” accordingly looks like an appendage. Access to the tower from the original house is awkward; as Willis pointed out, the plan of Sunnyside, especially the tower addition, is not straightforward. Narrow hallways and staircases, nooks and crannies, and cramped spaces abound. The generally small rooms on the first floor often have more than one point of access. The intricate, maze-like plan



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SOURCE: HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Fig. 6: First floor plan of Sunnyside

features numerous small hallways and closet spaces (fig. 6).

Irving evidently delighted in these complicated schemes, as evidenced from his description of John Bull's house. The key difference between Bull's house and Sunnyside, however, is that the former was created over a span of centuries, while Sunnyside is the creation of one owner over a much shorter amount of time. John Bull's house is an authentic accumulation involving many owners and builders, who employed the styles appropriate to their respective ages. As Irving writes, John Bull's house is of "irregular construction, [resulting] from its being the growth of centuries, and being improved by the wisdom of every generation."³⁵ Sunnyside displays a similar outward aspect, but without the accretion of time. Hence, Sunnyside represents a nineteenth-century gentleman's quick fix for Gothic intricacies. In order to pseudo-authenticate the building's age, Irving affixed the date "1656" to the west gable of the house, indicating the year the original dwelling



Fig. 7: Sunnyside's dated gable

was built (fig. 7).

The decorative arts at Sunnyside today, many of which belonged to Irving, further illuminate his diverse interests. Most interesting from a Gothic standpoint are two whimsical cast-iron benches that adorned the entrance to Sunnyside. They were a gift to Irving from Gouverneur Kemble, owner of the West Point Foundry in Cold Spring. The design of the benches was based on Irving's sketches that he included in a letter to Harvey in 1836.³⁶ While the interior of Sunnyside is not entirely devoid of Gothic Revival touches in its furnishings, the overall eclectic sensibility is that of comfort, taste, and refinement suitable to Irving's stature as a man of letters. The opposite of Gothic Revival whimsy, Irving's desk in his study (a gift from his publisher, G.P. Putnam) is downright functional, allowing two people to work simultaneously on its oak surface. Nuances of the Gothic Revival are found, however, in the pointed arches of the dining room chairs and the decoration of Irving's wine cabinets. In general, though, the architectural ornamentation inside Sunnyside (including the keystone arches of the west bedroom) as well as the furnishings are far from Gothic; indeed, it is the spirit of Picturesque irregularity in the plan and in the exterior of Sunnyside that most strongly relates the house to the Gothic Revival. Outside of his cottage, on the Picturesque landscape surrounding Sunnyside, Irving built two Gothic Revival buildings—the icehouse and gardener's cottage—which were simultaneously ornamental and functional.

What was Irving's inspiration for Sunnyside? Certainly, Scott's Abbotsford was the most significant model (fig. 8). Irving was imitating Scott, as evidenced by a letter he wrote in 1852, in which he asserts that he is not overspending on the renovations "as poor Scott did at Abbotsford."³⁷ Both houses share architectural similarities such as steeply pitched roofs, cross-gabbling, stepped gables, clustered chimney stacks, and irregular window sizing.³⁸ In addition, Sunnyside was stuccoed to have the illusion of cut stone, of which Abbotsford is constructed. Like Scott, Irving mingled the past into his home. Irving imported ivy clippings from the walls of Melrose Abbey to plant on his cottage, thereby organically linking the medieval past of Scotland with his own architectural creation (fig. 9). Scott had incorporated the stones of Melrose into Abbotsford, while Irving settled for a lighter souvenir to make the transatlantic passage. In so doing, Irving was adjusting for America's historical inadequacies; the horticulturist Andrew Jackson Downing praised ivy for its Old World associations, even suggesting that ivy failed

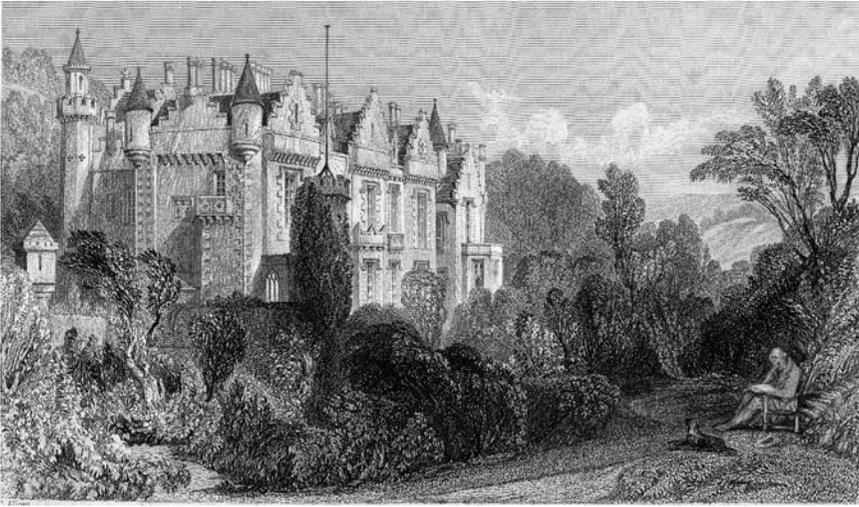


Fig. 8: Abbotsford, from William Beattie, *Scotland Illustrated* (London, G. Virtue, 1838)

to grow in the United States because of the nation's youth:

Certainly the finest of all this class of climbers is the European ivy. Such rich masses of glossy, deep green foliage, such fine contrasts of light and shade, and such a wealth of associations, is possessed by no other plant; the Ivy, to which the ghost of all the storied past alone tells its tale of departed greatness; the confidant of old ruined castles and abbeys... True to these instincts, the Ivy does not seem to be naturalized so easily in America as most other foreign vines. We are yet too young—this country of a great future, and a little past.³⁹

Historian Adam Sweeting notes the significance of Irving's ivy, writing that "with one clip of the pruning shears, a remarkable associational web involving Scottish history, Dutch legend, Robert the Bruce, and Katrina Van Tassel were forever linked by a vine... Using an old farmhouse on the banks of the Hudson the way his mentor appropriated the history of Melrose Abbey, Irving created a useable literary and historical past that existed outside the commercial present..."⁴⁰ The "associational web" that Sweeting describes is rich with implications; Irving's house is architecturally and intellectually eclectic. Irving included another tangible thread in his associational web with the addition of weathervanes from Dutch sources. According to Irving, one weathercock once adorned the Stadt-House in New Amsterdam (New York City) and another the Vander Heyden Palace of Albany. Irving asserted that a third weathervane, a gift



Fig. 9: Sunnyside from *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, XIV: LXXIX (Dec. 1856), 1

from Gill Davis, came from Rotterdam.⁴¹ Historically, however, the provenance is less important than Irving's *assertions* about their provenance. His descriptions of Sunnyside—his words—are as vital to the mythology of Sunnyside as the physicality of the house itself.

With the construction of his fanciful cottage, Irving attempted to blend fiction and reality in true Gothic fashion. He wrote a quasi-fictional history of the building, "Wolfert's Roost," originally published in 1839 and rewritten in 1855. In the sketch, Irving describes Sunnyside as "a little, old-fashioned stone mansion, all made up of gable ends, and as full of angles and corners as an old cocked hat." He then wraps the little house in superstition. During the pre-Revolutionary War period, it was "reputed to be harassed by Yankee witchcraft. When the weather was quiet every where else, the wind, it was said, would howl and whistle about the gables; witches and warlocks would whirl about upon the weather-cocks, and scream down the chimneys..." After the British burned the house down, it became a "melancholy ruin," avoided by the superstitious.⁴² The "Tappan Sea" near the house was also said to be haunted. Even if Sunnyside lacked Gothic architectural elements in its original Dutch colonial aspect, Irving recreated it as a haunted Gothic ruin. In so doing, he also recreates the atmosphere of Newstead Abbey, where, as he tells us in his essay, supernatural sightings were common among the domestic staff. Sunnyside represents the breakdown between fiction

and reality due to Irving's imaginative creation of legends surrounding his house. Such was Irving's style, as indicated by his alter ego, Geoffrey Crayon, who claims that "when I attempt to draw forth a fact, I cannot determine whether I have read, heard, or dreamt it; and I am always at a loss to know how much to believe of my own stories."⁴³

Scott's Abbotsford was not the only British source for Sunnyside, as Irving's house is in many respects an American version of Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill (1749-77). The fanciful Gothic Revival castle outside of London became the setting for what is considered the first Gothic novel, Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). At Strawberry Hill and Sunnyside, the Gothic impulse is the same, and both owners wrote stories about the Gothic architectural creations they designed themselves, with the help of others. When one examines Walpole's and Irving's own descriptions of their houses, it becomes clear that Irving was conscious of his imitation of Walpole's castle. Walpole often referred to Strawberry Hill in Lilliputian terms, exemplified by the following quotation: "[Strawberry Hill] is a little plaything-house...and is the prettiest bauble you ever saw."⁴⁴ Irving describes Sunnyside in similarly diminutive terms, repeatedly using the word "little" to describe the house. His intention, he says, was "to make a little nookery somewhat in the Dutch style, quaint but unpretending."⁴⁵ This miniaturization displays both Walpole's and Irving's sense of humor, which acts as an antidote to the gloom and doom of the Gothic literary genre in which both indulged in their writings.

Irving's little cottage had an important impact on American architectural history: it influenced Alexander Jackson Davis, the premiere domestic Gothic Revival architect in the decades before the Civil War. Davis and Irving met in 1837 through Davis's friend, James A. Hillhouse, of New Haven, Connecticut. According to Davis's daybook, in May 1839, he was reading Irving's works. Davis visited Sunnyside on occasion and drew the house on wood block for publication in A.J. Downing's *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening Adapted to North America* (1841). Friendship with Irving led to Davis's commission to design Knoll (later renamed Lyndhurst) in Tarrytown for William and Philip R. Paulding (1838; enlarged 1865-67). The villa echoes Sunnyside in its veranda; Dutch crow-stepped gables; and projecting, two-story entrance gable. Architectural historian Patrick Snadon argues that Davis's progress in architectural design between Glen Ellen (designed by Davis and his partner Ithiel Town for client Robert Gilmore III near Baltimore, Maryland, in 1832) and Knoll can be attributed to his exposure to Sunnyside. In particular, Snadon notes that the two-storied, gabled entryway at Knoll, a more sophisticated design than that of Glen

Ellen, owes its inspiration to Sunnyside's similar entrance. It is significant that Sunnyside, the amateur effort of Harvey and Irving, influenced Davis, a professional architect.⁴⁶

Perhaps Irving and Sunnyside are most like their Scottish counterparts Scott and Abbotsford in the steady stream of visitors they received, brought there by the fame of the author. Irving had arrived unannounced at Scott's doorstep in 1817, and Scott welcomed him heartily. In 1854, when the people of Dearman (a ten-minute walk from Sunnyside) voted to rename their railroad stop "Irvington," Irving was a very well-known figure and Sunnyside, through numerous prints, was equally famous. One guidebook called Sunnyside and its grounds "the great attraction of tourists from all parts of the world."⁴⁷ After Irving's death, the artist Christian Schussele celebrated Irving's similarities to Scott in his painting *Washington Irving and His Literary Friends at Sunnyside* (1863), which closely resembles in subject, composition, and title Thomas Faed's *Sir Walter Scott and His Literary Friends at Abbotsford* (1854). Scott had given Irving a copy of this engraving.⁴⁸ For Irving, like Scott, the romanticized medieval past was a rich source for both literary and architectural inspiration.

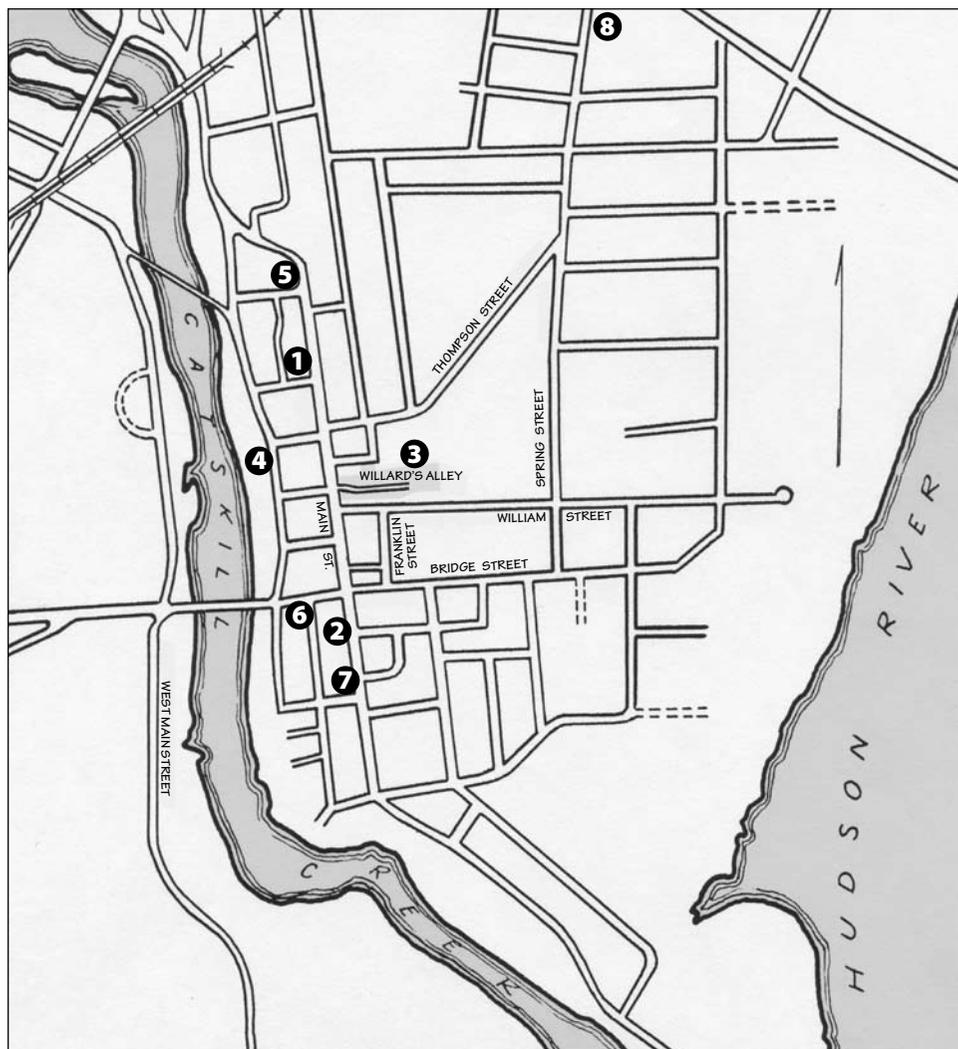
Endnotes

1. See W. Barksdale Maynard, "'Best, Lowliest Style!': The Early Nineteenth-Century Rediscovery of American Colonial Architecture," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 59:3 (Sept. 2000), 338-357.
2. Quoted in Hugh Grant Rowell, "The Interior Architecture," *American Collector*, XVI (Oct. 1947): 16.
3. The Gothic literary genre transported its readers to an imaginary realm, a pseudo-medieval place filled with dungeons, caverns, and all manner of subterranean labyrinths. Haunted castles, lascivious monks, and disembodied voices—the trappings of the Gothic novel gripped late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century readers with spine-tingling tales of treacherous villains and virtuous heroines. Without risking a hair on one's head (but perhaps raising more than one), the Gothic reader vicariously experienced supernatural happenings and gained access to the awful and sublime secrets of the human soul.
4. Theodore Tilton, *Sanctum Sanctorum, or Proof-sheets from an Editor's Table* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1870), 7.
5. Francis Parkman. *The Journals of Francis Parkman*, ed. Mason Wade (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1947; Kraus Reprint Co., New York, 1969), 227.
6. Emily Jane Cohen, "Museums of the Mind: The Gothic and the Art of Memory," *ELH*, 62:4 (1995), 887.
7. Irving's essays on Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey are based on his actual visits, about which he writes in his journals and letters. William Owen has argued that Abbotsford is an "imaginative reconstruction" of Irving's visit, rather than a factual account. He posits that the actual narrator is Irving's literary persona, Geoffrey Crayon. However, for the purposes of this article, I will refer to Irving as the writer of the two essays since it is impossible to separate what Irving actually experienced and what he fictionalized for the purposes of his essays. William Owen,

- “Reevaluating Scott: Washington Irving’s ‘Abbotsford,’” in *The Old and New World Romanticism of Washington Irving*, ed. Stanley Brodwin (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 69-78.
8. Washington Irving, “Abbotsford,” *The Crayon Miscellany*, ed. Dahlia Kirby Terrel, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 153.
 9. Washington Irving, “The Author’s Account of Himself,” in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819-20; New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 14.
 10. Irving, “Abbotsford,” 129.
 11. Quoted in Megan Aldrich, *Gothic Revival* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), 141.
 12. Henry Ward Beecher, *Star Papers; or Experiences of Art and Nature* (New York: J. C. Derby, 1855), 14-15.
 13. Irving, “Abbotsford,” 129-130, 125, 143.
 14. Washington Irving, “Newstead Abbey,” *The Crayon Miscellany*, ed. Dahlia Kirby Terrel (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 188, 181, 196-197, 175, 187.
 15. Irving, “The Author’s Account of Himself,” in *The Sketch Book*, 13.
 16. Washington Irving, *Journals and Notebooks (1803-1876)*, ed. Nathalia Wright, vol. 1 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), August 8, 1804, 55-56.
 17. Irving, *Journals*, vol. I, October 9, 1804, 489.
 18. Washington Irving, *Journals and Notebooks (1807-1822)*, vol. II, ed. Walter A. Rechart and Lillian Scissel (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), August 3, 1816, 76.
 19. Irving, “Westminster Abbey,” in *The Sketch Book*, 169-173.
 20. Washington Irving, *Letters (1802-1823)*, ed. Ralph M. Aderman, Herbert L. Kleinfield, and Jennifer S. Banks, vol. I (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), August 26, 1817, 490.
 21. Irving, *Letters (1802-1823)*, vol. I, July 27, 1815, 406-408.
 22. The most complete discussion of Irving as a Gothic writer appears in Ringe’s book *American Gothic*. While Ringe acknowledges that Irving read Radcliffe, he minimizes her impact on his work, citing Common Sense Philosophy (which sought rational explanations for supernatural phenomena) and German romances as stronger influences. Irving often employs the supernatural in his sketches to demonstrate the fallibility and gullibility of certain characters whose engagement with the supernatural is the result of mental deceptions. Irving’s comic elements clearly separate him from earlier Gothic writers. Donald Ringe, *American Gothic: Imagination and Reason in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1982), 80-101. There is a significant amount of scholarship on Irving and the Gothic, including: Oral Sumner Coad, “The Gothic Element in American Literature before 1835,” *Journal of English and German Philology*, 24 (1925), 72-93; John Clendenning, “Irving and the Gothic Tradition,” *Bucknell Review*, 12:2 (May 1964), 90-98; *Washington Irving: An American Study, 1802-1832* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 195-212; Donald A. Ringe, “Irving’s Use of the Gothic Mode,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 7:1 (1974), 51-65; and G. R. Thompson, “Washington Irving and the American Ghost Story,” in *The Haunted Dusk: American Supernatural Fiction, 1820-1920*, ed. John W. Crowley, Charles Crow, and Howard Kerr (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983), 11-36. For a discussion of Irving, haunting, and the Hudson Valley, see chapter two of Judith Richardson, *Possessions: The History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003).
 23. Washington Irving, *Tales of a Traveller by Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, ed. Judith Giblin Haig (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 189, 193, 32, 35.
 24. The most comprehensive work to date on Quidor is David M. Sokol, “John Quidor: His Life and Work,” Ph. D. Diss., New York University, 1971. See also Bryan Jay Wolf, *Romantic Re-Vision: Culture and Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century American Painting and Literature* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), chapter 4; David M. Sokol, “John Quidor, Literary Painter,” *The American Art Journal*, 2:1 (Spring 1970): 60-73; Christopher Kent Wilson,

- “Engraved Sources for Quidor’s Early Work,” *The American Art Journal* 8 (Nov. 1976), 17-25; and exhibition catalogues David M. Sokol, *John Quidor: Painter of American Legend*, (Wichita: Wichita Art Museum, 1973); John I. H. Baur, *John Quidor* (Utica: New York State Council on the Arts, 1965); and John I. H. Baur, *Three Nineteenth Century American Painters, John Quidor, Eastman Johnson, Theodore Robinson* (New York: Arno Press, 1969). These last two catalogs are reprinted from Baur’s 1942 exhibition catalog from the Brooklyn Museum. In *Painting the Dark Side*, Sarah Burns addresses the question of race in Quidor’s paintings, which she describes as “powerful visual metaphors for what we might call *fear of the dark* in white antebellum culture.” Sarah Burns, *Painting the Dark Side: Art and the Gothic Imagination in Nineteenth-century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 101.
25. Irving, *Tales of a Traveller*, 259.
 26. Wolf, 122.
 27. Quidor also painted an earlier version of the same subject in 1828. In the earlier version, someone other than Quidor added the horseman; since removed from the original painting, the horseman can be seen in a reproduction in John I. Bauer, *John Quidor*, 23. See Rebecca Bedell, “John Quidor and the Demonic Imagination: *Ichabod Crane Flying from the Headless Horseman* (c. 1828),” *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 11:1 (1998), 6.
 28. Sokol, 63.
 29. On Sunnyside, see David R. Anderson, “A Quaint, Picturesque Little Pile: Architecture and the Past in Washington Irving,” *The Old and New World Romanticism of Washington Irving*, ed. Stanley Brodwin (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 139-149; Joseph T. Butler, “Washington Irving and His Home, Sunnyside,” *Washington Irving, A Tribute*, ed. Andrew B. Myers (Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Restorations, 1972); Joseph T. Butler, *Washington Irving’s Sunnyside* (Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Restorations, 1974); Harold Dean Cater, “Washington Irving and Sunnyside,” *New York History*, XXXVIII: 2 (April 1957): 123-166; Kathleen Eagen Johnson, *Washington Irving’s Sunnyside* (Tarrytown, NY: Historic Hudson Valley Press, 1995); Andrew B. Myers, “Sunnyside: From Saltbox to Snuggery to Shrine,” *The Knickerbocker Tradition: Washington Irving’s New York*, ed. Andrew B. Myers (Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Restorations, 1974); Clay Lancaster, “The Architecture of Sunnyside,” *American Collector*, XVI (Oct. 1947), 13-15; Hugh Grant Rowell, “The Interior Architecture,” *American Collector*, XVI (Oct. 1947), 16-18; and Robert M. Toole, “An American Cottage Ornée: Washington Irving’s Sunnyside, 1835-1859,” *Journal of Garden History*, 12:1 (1992), 52-72. See also W. Barksdale Maynard, *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 88-92; Thomas G. Connors, “The Romantic Landscape: Washington Irving, Sleepy Hollow, and the Rural Cemetery Movement,” in *Mortal Remains: Death in Early America*, ed. Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 187-245; Patrick Snadon, “A. J. Davis and the Gothic Revival Castle in America, 1832-1865,” Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1988, 293-301; Janice Schimmelman, “The Spirit of the Gothic: The Gothic Revival House in Nineteenth-Century America,” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1980, 134-38; and Adam Sweeting, *Reading Houses and Building Books: Andrew Jackson Downing and the Architecture of Popular Antebellum Literature, 1835-1855* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1996), 134-139.
 30. This architectural feature, also called corbie steps, can be found not only in Flanders and Holland, but also in north Germany and East Anglia, as well as sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scottish architecture
 31. Numerous commentators have mentioned this idiosyncrasy of Sunnyside, including Wayne Franklin, “Cooper and New York’s Dutch Heritage,” *James Fenimore Cooper Society Miscellaneous Papers*, 5 (1994), 18-24.
 32. Quoted in Schimmelman, 137. For an analysis of the later influence of Dutch art and architecture on American culture (1880-1920), see Annette Stott, *Holland Mania: The Unknown Dutch Period in American Art and Culture* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1998). See also Joyce

- D. Goodfriend, ed., *Revisiting New Netherland: Perspectives on Early Dutch America* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005) and Joyce D. Goodfriend, Benjamin Schmidt, and Annette Stott, *Going Dutch: The Dutch Presence in America, 1609-2009* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008).
33. Quoted in Sweeting, 137.
 34. David Anderson mentions the similarities between Sunnyside and John Bull's house in Anderson, 141, as does Sweeting, 138. Irving, "John Bull," in *The Sketch Book*, 304.
 35. Irving, "John Bull," in *The Sketch Book*, 305.
 36. Butler, *Washington Irving's Sunnyside*, 42-3.
 37. Quoted in Anderson, 145.
 38. Johnson, 11.
 39. Andrew Jackson Downing, "On the Drapery of Cottages and Gardens," in *Rural Essays* (New York: George P. Putnam and Company, 1853), 94.
 40. Sweeting, 135.
 41. Johnson, 8.
 42. Washington Irving, *Wolfert's Roost*, ed. Roberta Rosenberg (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 3, 6, 11.
 43. Irving, *Tales of a Traveller*, 4.
 44. Quoted in W. S. Lewis, "The Genesis of Strawberry Hill," *Metropolitan Museum Studies*, V:1 (June 1934), 60.
 45. Irving, *Letters*, II, July 8, 1835, 835; Irving uses the word "little" to describe Sunnyside in the following letters: *Letters*, III, January 13, 1843, 473; *Letters*, III, June 21, 1843, 544; and *Letters*, IV, November 8, 1846, 104. Twentieth-century scholars have followed suit; Cater calls Sunnyside a "polished miniature."
 46. Snadon, 296, 301. For more information on Davis's designs of Glen Ellen and Knoll, see Susanne Brendel-Pandich, "From Cottages to Castles: The Country House Designs of Alexander Jackson Davis," in *Alexander Jackson Davis: American Architect 1803-1892*, ed. Amelia Peck (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 58-79 and Kerry Dean Carso, "Diagnosing the 'Sir Walter Disease': American Architecture in the Age of Romantic Literature," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 35:4 (December 2002), 121-142. Irving and Gilmor knew each other from their travels in England, and Walpole's Strawberry Hill and Scott's Abbotsford influenced both men in the designs of their respective houses. Snadon, 298.
 47. *Miller's New York As It Is, or Stranger's Guide to the Cities of New York, Brooklyn and Adjacent Places...* (New York: J. Miller, 1866), 125.
 48. Butler, *Washington Irving's Sunnyside*, 53.



1. Former Village Hall, burned—1935
2. Catskill Savings Bank Lot—1957
3. Willard's Alley, demolished—1960
4. Newberry's Lot—1960
5. Smith House, demolished—1962
6. CURE Lot—1972
7. Saulpaugh Hotel, demolished—1974
8. Thomas Cole's Cedar Grove

The Parking Lots of Main Street, Catskill

Theodore Hilscher

Main Street

One sunny morning in 1970, Catskill attorney Alan Ruf met insurance man Edwin Grossmann on the sidewalk in front of the DuBois Pharmacy at 379 Main Street in the Village of Catskill, in Greene County. As recalled by Grossman thirty years later, Ruf said to Grossmann, “I got a call from Sophie. She’s sick and tired of collecting rent. She wants \$10,000 for her building.” “Sew it up,” Grossmann said. “We’ll get the money.” Sophie was Sophie Richman Knopler, owner of an aging, three-story brick building at 48 Bridge Street. Grossmann, Ruf, and a third colleague, men’s clothes shop owner Robert Winans, had mused many times over lunch how “wouldn’t it be nice” if somebody could do something about “those slums” at Bridge and Hill Streets, one block west of Main. In short order, these sons of Catskill—each the second generation in his father’s business—obtained private financing for the purchase of the Knopler property and several adjacent parcels, and leveled all standing buildings. Where Knopler’s building once stood is today the parking lot serving the county courthouse and the professional offices near the corner of Main and Bridge.¹

The development of the corner of Bridge and Hill Streets into a parking lot by a small cadre of business leaders underscores the haphazard nature of the creation of public parking in Catskill. No systematic response to parking needs was ever developed. For most of the lots serving the Main Street commercial district—and all of those built between 1960 and 1975—the creation of parking was a secondary result of other objectives. A response to the obsolescence of a prior commercial use or some notion of community-engineering involving the leveling of old housing stock and the displacement of black residents were the primary goals of which parking lots were a by-product. The incidental accommodation of the automobile in the pursuit of other goals has been long noted. In 1961, urban planner Jane Jacobs questioned “how much of the destruction wrought by automobiles on cities is really a response to transportation and traffic needs, and how

much of it is owing to sheer disrespect for other city needs, uses and functions?"²

This article will analyze when and how the parking lots of downtown Catskill came to be built, and demonstrate an inverse relationship between the existence of parking lots and the health of Main Street. During the first forty years of the automobile age, when there was at least as much vehicle traffic on Main Street as in the second forty years, only one parking lot was built—and that only after the accidental destruction of a building. During this time, Catskill enjoyed its status as county seat, as well as a regional center of employment, shopping, and banking, and a base of summer tourism. The village population reached its all-time high of over 5,800 residents. Business boomed, without off-street parking. The numbers and types of goods provided by the merchants met all the typical needs of local consumers. There were complaints about the lack of parking, about which the merchants did nothing as long as there were no practical shopping alternatives to Main Street.

When alternatives appeared, the creation of off-street parking was not enough to entice shoppers, and shops closed. As it turned out, the parking lot age also was the age of Main Street decline, as defined by a diminution of numbers and types of goods available. Major transportation routes (which bypassed Catskill and took Catskillians to work and shop in other places), a new commercial and residential orientation toward the west side of the village, and the move of many merchants from their Main Street apartments led to this decline.

Parking on the Main Street of small-town America has received no real attention from historians, except for the occasional, off-hand comments found in studies of sprawl and suburbanization. "By the 1920's... it became increasingly evident that Main Street was the invention of a bygone era and had not been designed for the automobile... motorists wishing to shop grew impatient with crowded streets and lack of parking," noted Chester Liebs in *Main Street to Miracle Mile*. In "From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America," Lizabeth Cohen wrote: "traffic congestion and parking problems discouraged commercial expansion in central business districts of cities and smaller market towns, already hindered by a short supply of developable space." The claims of Liebs and Cohen are contradicted by what happened in Catskill, where the largest Main Street retailer expanded in 1955 and announced expansion again in 1960 before any construction of significant off-street parking on Main Street. Liebs and Cohen were not considering, or they underestimated, that characteristic of small-town life that can be described as spatial focus.³

In the forward to Richard Francaviglia's *Main Street Revisited*, Wayne Franklin

discusses the development of the typical Main Street in American history. Main Street is not simply a concentration of buildings and people. It requires, Franklin notes, “a spatially focused population indoctrinated in the virtues of consumption.” Such a population goes to Main Street to spend money, even in the absence of parking, when there are no alternatives. Alternatives invite this population to lose its spatial focus.⁴

Main Street has been the commercial center of the Village of Catskill, and Greene County, since its earliest days. It runs two blocks east of and parallel to Catskill Creek, and below the spine of the peninsula of land between the Hudson River and the creek. Hills rise west of the creek and east and north of Main Street on the east side. Because of its location at the head of a narrow valley, Main Street began life as a gateway to the west. Beginning in 1801, Main Street was the eastern end of the Catskill-Susquehanna Turnpike on which settlers pressed into central New York and goods from the west headed to the Hudson and then to East Coast markets. Down Main Street came wagons loaded with Catskill Mountain lumber and bags of wheat milled along Catskill Creek. Drove of cattle, hogs, and turkeys—wings clipped, their feet tarred for durability—passed through, making noise and dust, and were herded into pens at the riverfront to await slaughtering. In the opposite direction came animal skins from South America, transported upriver and then up Main Street, on their way to the world’s largest tannery in Prattsville, thirty-six miles to the west. The village grew up around Main Street. Eventually, some commerce extended along Bridge Street, perpendicular to Main, and then along West Bridge Street, on the west side of the creek. The west side otherwise remained the village outskirts before the automobile age.⁵

Catskill’s era as one of the leading commercial centers in the state ended with the completion of the Erie Canal. The village then became well-known in another way. In 1825, a steamboat brought young Thomas Cole. Cole used the village as the base of his explorations of the mountains, where he made landscape paintings that drew great attention in New York City that fall. Cole and his followers went on to establish the Catskill region as a mecca for America’s artists for the next half-century.⁶

Popularized as well by James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving in literature, the Catskills became a leading tourist destination. Presidents of the United States and European sightseers joined the elite of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston at the Catskill Mountain House, a few miles west of the village. By the end of the nineteenth century, middle-class urbanites visited hundreds of lesser resorts and boarding houses in Greene County. They arrived in Catskill by steamboat and train. The steamboat landing, or the Point, could also be reached

by ferry from the Greendale train station on the east bank of the Hudson in Columbia County. A narrow-gauge rail took passengers from Main Street to the Mountain House and nearby communities; an electric trolley ran up Main Street and west to Leeds. These rails carrying vacationers out from Catskill also brought residents from other parts of the county to Main Street.⁷

Catskill merchants benefited from a spatially focused population. Summer tourists and resort keepers from outlying areas; nearby farmers; the employees of the village mills, brickyards, and boatyards; and village residents all did their business on Main Street. Before the automobile, residents of southwestern Columbia County shopped on Main Street because it was closer to them by ferry or sleigh than the city of Hudson, Columbia County's seat. Main Street was the regional Wall Street—the home to three of the county's four banks. The county seat of government and law, the supervisors of fourteen towns met there to transact county business; clients met with attorneys to settle estates and close real estate deals; and trial juries sat.⁸

The merchants concentrated their shops. An 1856 map shows Main Street virtually solid with buildings north from Bridge Street for five blocks until it turns west to follow the creek. South of Bridge on Main there are open lots, side yards between buildings, and front yards, indicating a residential section. The intersection of Main and Bridge has always been the center of the village, and the early demarcation between storefronts and homes. Such a demarcation conflicts with the vision of modern urban planners, who believe they can recreate a nineteenth-century atmosphere by promoting a commercial district as a desirable place to live. Catskillians have always tried to live away from downtown, figuratively if not literally. One of the last two remaining buildings in the central commercial district built as a single-family residence is the Bogardus house, dating from before 1821. It sits facing the creek, its back to Main Street.⁹

The American desire to live away from urban density runs deeply, according to historians of the American landscape. Sam Bass Warner says we inherited this trait from our English ancestors. Eric Foner has noted that Philadelphia's aristocracy had built over 150 country estates within a dozen miles of the city by 1752. James Kunstler and Kenneth Jackson both credit none other than Thomas Cole and his landscapes with bringing nature safely to our homes and door yards, thus creating the ethic of suburbanization. So it was as part of a rich tradition that successful Catskillians moved off Main Street. On top of the hill between Main Street and the Hudson River, in 1856, were the Pruyne estate, the Bartow-Cole estate, Powers Place, and three Day houses. Stephen Day, one of the founders of the Susquehanna Turnpike and Tanners National Bank, built the first house on

the hill in 1803. He was soon followed by Isaac Pruyn, a lawyer and a businessman. The family of Thomas Cole's wife ran the ferry to Greendale and dealt in hardware, imports, and exports; attorney James Powers helped develop the Mountain House site. These wealthy Catskill businessmen built large homes on large parcels away from the sights, sounds, and smells of Main Street—but still close enough by a short carriage ride or walk. If Cole is indeed the founder of the suburban ideal, Catskill must be credited as the place where he lived that setting, neither city nor country, which became the landscape of the American dream.¹⁰

By the turn of the twentieth century, well-to-do businessmen developed almost all of the top of the hill above Main Street with expensive homes on lots measured in feet, not acres. With river-view lots along Prospect Avenue taken, the next street to the west, Liberty Street, was where Catskill Mountain Railway owner Charles Beach built his new home in 1904. Those not as prosperous but still seeking suburbia built along the trolley line, which ran through the countryside to Leeds between 1904 and 1917. The separation of work from home, as well as the construction of a home separated from the street by a lawn, indicated status. Main Street, by comparison, was dusty, devoid of pastoral elements like trees, and a place where any sort of person could pass by. Construction of churches and schools was acceptable in residential areas, but commercial enterprises located to Main Street or Bridge Street.¹¹

The Automobile Age

In 1917, at the beginning of the automobile age, there were 165 businesses between 217 Main and 495 Main. Forty-seven, or 28 percent, were occupied by resident/merchants—businessmen or women living and working at the same address. (Physicians were the exception to the rule that those who could afford to moved off Main Street. All eight village physicians lived and worked at a Main Street address.) Twenty more Main Street merchants lived at another Main Street address, although some lived in the residential area of lower Main.¹²

The large increase in automobile use during the twenties resulted in only a small decrease in resident/merchants on Main Street. Motor-vehicle registrations increased in Greene County between 1921 and 1930 from 3,718 to 8,986, or from one automobile for every seven residents to one for every three. The car's new affordability and improved roads created much greater opportunity to live away from work. However, in 1930 there were still forty-two resident/merchants on Main Street, a decrease of just five since 1917.¹³

Many of the resident/merchants were immigrants. Margolius and Furman were Russian Jews; Cornelius (from Corniglia), Fontanella, Strozzi, Valente,

Yannone, and Migone were Italian; Eng and Sing were Chinese. Perhaps they were more likely to live on Main Street because they were acclimated to urban space in their native countries. Perhaps they had not yet saved enough to move away from Main Street. Whatever the reason, their strong presence filled what otherwise might have been a void on Main Street in types of goods offered for sale and degree of occupancy in and above storefronts. The number of so many immigrants in Main Street businesses reflects Catskill's overall cultural diversity. Consistently, ten to eleven percent of the village population from 1910 to 1930 was foreign born, including 625 in 1910.¹⁴

Because it was a residential as well as commercial center, Main Street was busy day and night with foot traffic. In 1930, shoppers had their choice of three bakeries, nine stores carrying men's clothing and one more selling only hats, ten butchers and one fish dealer, eleven grocers, three jewelers, a camera shop, six places to buy paint, and seven places to buy shoes. There were four banks, numerous attorneys, and insurance offices. Residents of the county's distant points came to Main Street for the banks, courthouse business, the moving pictures, and to buy finer clothing than that available where they lived. The 1930 directory notes the appearance of five chain stores on Main Street: department stores W.T. Grant and J.J. Newberry, Endicott Johnson shoe store, and grocers Grand Union and A&P Tea Company. In contrast, there was only one chain in 1917, the Union Pacific Tea Company. Another development by 1930 was the arrival of indoor golf in three locations on Main Street. Evidently, indoor golf was a rainy-day diversion offered to the many vacationers who motored to the northern Catskills.¹⁵

The increase of automobiles during the twenties coincided with the elimination of the railroad as a means of transportation between Catskill and other points in the county. The electric trolley to Leeds was discontinued in 1917. Two years later, the Catskill Mountain Railway, with its routes to the mountaintop and Cairo, was torn up. Residents from these points west of the county seat, as well as the many summertime vacationers in Leeds and Cairo, could now travel to Main Street only by car.¹⁶

At the same time that automobile travel increased, the number of tourists traveling by water peaked. This, too, increased automobile traffic on Main Street. The Hudson River Day Boat, running between New York and Albany, landed at Catskill two times each day. Two million passengers made some part of that run in 1925, the Day Boat's best year. Each day over the course of a summer, rivergoers poured onto Main Street by the thousands, to be transported from the Point in automobiles by the resort and boarding-house owners with whom they were staying.¹⁷

Hundreds of resorts and boarding houses were opened for the first time in Greene County in the 1920s and early 1930s. Resorts almost always started out as boarding houses, which were just farmhouses where guests were set up in spare rooms. The largest resort in the county to make it to the twenty-first century was Sausto's Pleasant Acres in Leeds, which started in a farmhouse in 1927; the five resorts in nearby Greenville to last through 2000 all were either started or expanded in this era. On Roberts Hill Road in New Baltimore, Mrs. Charles Roberts had an addition built onto the dining room at her boarding house in 1921. Just east of Oak Hill, Harriet "Hattie" Brand, recently widowed with three small children and unable to run her farm, started Elm Rest, which eventually grew to accommodate 150 guests at a time. The proliferation of the car was responsible for the resort boom; the percentage of increase in car registration in Greene County was mirrored nationwide. The automobile also empowered urbanites wanting to leave the city for good. Population in the village increased during the twenties, reversing a trend of at least two decades. The population of Greene County grew for the first time since the 1870s.¹⁸

An increase in car ownership was followed by an upgrade of the highway system, which in turn led to more traffic in Catskill. Main Street was a quick detour from US 9W, a new north-south route through the countryside on the west end of the village, which was completed in the 1930s. On July 2, 1935, the Rip Van Winkle Bridge over the Hudson River was opened, connecting Catskill by automobile to points east for the first time. The second part of the bridge project was the construction of a new road from the west side of the bridge to Route 9W, completed by December 1936. For the next thirty-three years, until Route 23 was rerouted to Cairo, westbound traffic over the bridge was directed via Route 9W to upper Main Street and out to the resort communities west of Catskill. This also brought more traffic to downtown, a minute or two by car east of the 9W-Upper Main Street intersection.¹⁹

The automobile age increased prosperity on Main Street, which witnessed an amount of new construction reflecting the general confidence in downtown. The Saulpaugh Hotel was enlarged in 1926. The U.S. Post Office, the Jewish temple, the Co-operative Mutual Insurance building, the Elks Lodge, and the 412-414 Main block, all were built between 1929 and 1936. The last two were replacements for buildings lost in the Kortz Furniture Store fire of May 1, 1928. The replacement of buildings lost to fire demonstrates that, in 1928, commercial land was too valuable to turn into parking.²⁰

A Main Street address was such a hot ticket in 1924 that Philip Richman moved his apparel business from 48 Bridge Street, where he had been for 21 years,

to 395 Main Street—a five-minute walk away. Richman's decision to move was driven by the desire to reach pedestrian traffic, in disregard of vehicular traffic. His old location, being on the periphery of downtown at the demarcation of the non-commercial district, would have provided easier parking. Richman traded that for the increased number of potential customers passing on foot from one shop to another. There were many more cars on Main Street, but the absence of parking did not hurt business. Entrepreneurs were drawn to Main Street in Catskill from other places in upstate New York. In 1930, Alex Grossmann moved from Binghamton and opened an insurance office; and in 1936, Earl Winans came from Canajoharie, at age 50, and took over I. M. Margolius's men's shop.²¹

Fire led to the first parking lot on Main Street. On the morning of January 15, 1935, a blaze destroyed the Catskill Village Hall at 431 Main Street, just north of Church Street. It is not known exactly when the vacant lot was first utilized for parking. During the busy summer of 1936, the local newspaper, the *Catskill Daily Mail*, was reporting: "the fact remains that at times in the business section, not a place can be found in which to park. Some cities and villages have free parking places but thus far Catskill has none other than the streets." Despite this complaint, the need for parking could not have been so badly felt if the village lot was not yet pressed into service eighteen months after the fire. The village's 1958 Comprehensive Development Plan shows the village lot was used for parking by that time.²²

While the absence of parking may have been bemoaned since at least the 1936 *Catskill Daily Mail* editorial, the absence of a downtown lot had not deterred business growth there. Thirty-five years into the automobile age—and without off-street parking—the Newberry department store made substantial investments in early 1955 by building a three-story addition to the rear along Water Street, renovating its soda fountain and lunch counter, and installing a sleek, modernistic facade of porcelain and enamel sheathing 65 feet wide across the second and third floors of its two storefronts. Main Street's largest retailer was not alone in its optimism. On April 19, 1958, the *Catskill Daily Mail* reported there were nine Main Street merchants spending between \$75,000 to \$80,000 on renovations or expansion. "Increasing business dictated the move to expanded quarters," reported one merchant. In 1960, a new Sherwin-Williams paint store came to Main Street. Newberry also announced that year that it was expanding into a third, adjacent store front, and acquiring 48,000 square feet of its own parking space—enough for 200 cars—on Water Street. This lot was created by the demolition of antiquated industrial buildings along the waterfront. For the first time, in 1960, a lot was created as an adjunct to a Main Street retailer.²³

The Parking Lot Age

After World War II, transportation routes that had once pointed out-of-towners onto Main Street were being eliminated or replaced by alternative, faster routes that avoided downtown. In 1948, the Day Line stopped docking on a daily basis at Catskill. The ferry to Greendale had ceased running in 1939; no longer were there cars on Main Street going to and from the Point to pick up travelers arriving on the river. Then on October 25, 1954, Governor Thomas E. Dewey presided over festivities at the Catskill interchange of the New York State Thruway, opening from Newburgh to Utica that day. This route made Route 9W obsolete for long-distance travelers. Its impact on Catskill was immediate. In January 1955, Greyhound announced that five daily buses running to and from the terminal on Main Street would be cut. Instead, summer routes would run directly from New York City up the Thruway and on to Cairo, Freehold, and Greenville with no change-over in Catskill, as had been the case. The same month, the New York Central announced that passenger service through Catskill was being cut to one train a day in each direction.²⁴

Not only did the Thruway direct out-of-towners away from Main Street, but it destroyed the spatial focus of the local population on downtown Catskill. In 1958, the Comprehensive Plan reported, “Due to recently improved transportation, Catskill residents can now commute to work as far away as Schenectady and Kingston.” Those people taking the Thruway each day were not only commuters to work, but prospective patrons of stores near work. Once residents work outside the area in which they live, it becomes that much easier to shop outside the area in which they live. Catskill-area residents now began to choose to shop off Main Street.²⁵

After 1969, the rerouting of Route 23, the major east-west artery, meant that travelers heading for Leeds, Greenville, Howe Caverns, or any other point west of Catskill were no longer directed to Main Street from the Rip Van Winkle Bridge. They avoided the village completely. Catskill had been bypassed twice—first by north/south traffic on the Thruway, and now by traffic on Route 23. Ironically, at the time new traffic routes were diverting cars off the village’s Main Street, the era of the parking lot began.²⁶ Between 1957 and 1974, six large parking lots were constructed that changed Catskill’s landscape significantly. In each case, they required the removal of buildings perceived as obsolete or in poor repair.

In 1957, Catskill Savings Bank bought the home of the widow of Dr. George L. Branch at 317 Main. It demolished the Second Empire house with green gables and grand first- and second-story porches, and created parking lot.²⁷ This was the

first lot intentionally created on Main Street. By 1963, the bank doubled the size of the parking lot by demolishing Dr. Frederick Goodrich's former home and office on the south side of the Branch house, and a second building formerly owned by Dr. Branch on the north side. This lot proved to be convenient for patrons of the courthouse as well as the bank. Catskill Savings Bank's demolition of the Branch and Goodrich residences further demonstrated the appeal of suburbia and the fading desirability of large, single-family residences so close to downtown. Perhaps the prospect of seeing them converted into multifamily residential dwellings across the street from the county courthouse played a role in their demolition.²⁸

Each of the other three Main Street banks, following Catskill Savings' lead, later made small parking lots on either Bridge or Church Streets by razing buildings. However, the most important recognition of the automobile by the banks was not the parking lot, but the building of branch offices like the one Catskill Savings put on Route 9W. Branch offices were located where they were accessible by automobile, allowing customers to avoid walking on Main Street.

The first lot built inside the downtown core between Bridge and Church Streets came with the leveling of a small residential area known as Willard's Alley. The houses there were targeted as a result of a 1953 study commissioned by the Catskill Chamber of Commerce, which determined that space for 140 cars would be created. Willard's Alley was a name long applied to a hollow between William Street and Thomson Street, to the rear of the Willard Building on Main Street.²⁹

There is no record of any consideration given in the 1950s to sacrificing any important commercial buildings for downtown parking. Willard's Alley became the sole focus. Along this dead-end dirt path, barely accessible by an automobile, stood eight wooden residences and several outbuildings. These buildings, most of them of two or three stories, dated back to the post-Civil War construction boom. Three of the dwellings were converted stables. According to the 1905 census, fifty-three residents—nineteen blacks and thirty-four whites—inhabited the buildings. Ten years later, thirty-nine persons lived in the alley. The white population had decreased to fourteen; the black population increased to twenty-five. Two of the multifamily buildings were racially mixed.³⁰

Following World War I, the black migration reached Catskill. Most of the migrants came either from Macon or Warrenton, Georgia; years later, it seemed to Mrs. Mary Wilburn that "half of Warrenton must have come here." Men had been recruited in Macon to work at the Washburn Brick Company on West Main Street by an agent sent by the brickyard. Others followed the recommendations of family and friends who had already made the trip north and told them

jobs were available in places like American Valve in Coxsackie. Willard's Alley became a black enclave. By 1925, there were forty-five persons living there, all black. Sixteen women reported to the census taker that they were housekeepers. The next most common occupations were cement work (seven) and brickyard (five). One man worked as a bellboy, one worked in a chair factory, and another unloaded coal boats. While not invisible in village life, the alley's residents were certainly not in the foreground. A 1939 photograph of a fireman's parade shows a street full of white observers, except for a small group of blacks standing at the entrance to Willard's Alley. All the marchers appear to be white.³¹

According to census records, one family living in the alley in 1905—the Lipscombs—was still residing there in 1925. Seventeen people lived there both in 1915 and 1925, representing 38 percent of the 1925 population. Eddie Terry, a resident in 1915, was still there in 1957. Surely, it was a neighborhood in the sense that residency there was relatively static. It also served as a portal, a place where poor, uprooted southern blacks could land and begin to adjust to the north. When Charles Hawshaw moved up from Macon in 1954, he stayed with his aunts at 23 Willard's Alley. Emigrants could also find support from whites who themselves had once been outsiders in Catskill. Abraham and David Sherman, sons of a Polish Jew who immigrated to Catskill, hired teenager Harold Wilburn, whose family made the move to Willard's Alley from Macon in 1949, to work in their fruit store.³²

In a lighthearted look at his boyhood written fifty years later, a white teenager who lived on Main Street in the 1950s remembered Willard's Alley as an alien and strange place:

The Blacks in Catskill lived in one confined area, a wooded dale in the middle of town called Willard's Alley. Willard's Alley was a bit of the old South that had somehow been uprooted and transplanted in the middle of New York. The unpainted wooden houses were mostly one-story structures with shaky porches and tar paper roofs. The roads were dirt and became quagmires during hard rains. The smell of wood smoke and kerosene hung heavy over Willard's Alley through the cold days of winter and dogs barked and roosters crowed all year round... Few white people dared enter Willard's Alley alone. It was as if the world we understood ended where that dirt road began. Almost every kid knew someone who knew someone who had ventured into Willard's Alley by himself and never been seen again...³³

The actual Willard's Alley was somewhat different from this mythical description. Former residents recalled no roosters, just goats kept by the one white

resident of this era, Mary Meracle.³⁴

Were these buildings in need of demolition? Each had electricity and indoor toilets; the alley was served by water and sewer lines that tied into the village systems. Almost certainly, none of the buildings had central heat. The Fords, living on the first two floors at 17 Willard's Alley, cooked and heated with coal and wood. Above on the third floor, the Terrys used kerosene. However, this was during a time when many, if not most, middle-class homes in Greene County lacked central heat.³⁵

A former resident of 17 Willard's Alley considered the building "old and raggedy," while 23 was remembered as well-maintained. Meracle was the alley's only owner/occupant. Surely, the rest of the buildings suffered in some degree from their absentee ownership. Nearly all needed paint. Yet, when the 1958 Comprehensive Plan identified fifteen "areas of blight or potential blight" in the village, Willard's Alley was not so designated. Was this omission an oversight or recognition that conditions in the alley were not that bad?³⁶

In 1955, the state legislature passed a bill creating the Catskill Housing Authority, a vehicle through which federally backed bonds would fund "low cost" housing. Those people who lost their homes in the Willard's Alley demolition could utilize such housing, reported the *Catskill Daily Mail*. Soon to follow was the confirmation that the Urban Renewal Administration would fund two-thirds of the cost of the leveling of Willard's Alley, with the remaining third to be a local expense. In 1958, the Catskill Housing Authority razed a number of old buildings between Hill Street and the creek, some of them home to black families. Eighty units of low-income housing called Hop-O-Nose Apartments were built. Some alley residents moved to Hop-O-Nose, but not all. Reggie and Mabel Heath Deyo bought a house on Bushnell Avenue, which seems to indicate that residency in the alley had been a choice for them.³⁷

The alley was leveled in August 1960. (The official name of the demolition, according to the engineering plans, was "Willard's Alley Renewal Project.") In order to provide better access into the new parking lot—the alley was too narrow for two lanes—the village government also tore down the Semonoff building at 376 Main, which at the time housed a drug store and meat market. Local leaders congratulated each other on the completion of three tasks—the clearing of two areas of old housing stock, creation of new housing, and new downtown parking.³⁸

The unreported fourth accomplishment in the minds of some was the removal of blacks from the central business district. This era in which Catskill leaders removed the small black neighborhood in their little downtown also



THE COLLECTION OF MARK KRSTOVICH

Photo by Earl Cooper, c. 1959, looking west down the alley to Main Street

was one in which whites in Greene County either openly exhibited or quietly tolerated racial insensitivity. Spring seems to have been the time of year when minstrel shows were a norm for entertainment and fundraising in Greene County. The front page of the *Catskill Daily Mail* in April 1955 promoted one minstrel sponsored by the Lions Club at the Hunter-Tannersville school. It featured the county judge. In April 1958, the newspaper advertised a minstrel sponsored by the Knights of Columbus in Coxsackie. In fact, the Catskill Council Knights of Columbus minstrel show traveled from venue to venue, raising money for local Catholic churches. On April 4, 1960, a front page photograph showed a scene from the minstrel just given by the Cornell Hook & Ladder Company in New Baltimore. Four white men appearing in black face are identified as Jazzbo, Behop, Jughead, and Cupcake.³⁹

Willard's Alley became the municipal parking lot, and the only lot located in the central commercial district between Bridge and Church streets for the next forty years. At this point, Main Street was still a good place to be in business. The village population in 1960 reached 5,825, the only time in the twentieth century that it passed the population of 1900. The Main Street shopper could consider four stores for men's clothing and six for women's apparel, two department stores; three "supermarkets" for groceries and meats; three more markets selling primarily

meat; the same three jewelers that were in business in 1930; three stores to buy paint; and six pharmacies. Insurance brokers, attorneys, and the four banks remained a constant. Eighty-five percent of working village residents worked in Greene County. Between 1920 and 1960, despite a dramatic increase in car ownership parking lots had not been deemed necessary by Main Street merchants. The 1958 Comprehensive Plan, completed in August 1958, provides a snapshot just as the village was about to enter the parking lot era. It stated that “Catskill retail sales were twice as great as the effective buying income of its residents,” meaning merchants were doing far better business than they had a right to expect for a place of Catskill’s size. This was primarily because of summer tourists and shoppers from nearby locations.⁴⁰

But in spite of its apparent health, the perception of Main Street was changing. William Conine, a butcher, was representative of many Main Street merchants who moved out of their second-floor Main Street residences. Conine continued to tend the meat market started by his father at the turn of the century, but in 1953 he moved to Jefferson Heights, a new development, where he owned a small house with an apple tree on the front lawn and cherry and pear trees in the backyard. Each morning, he left his house, got into his car, and drove one mile to work instead of walking down one flight of stairs from the apartment over his store, as he had done for years. Conine’s house was about the same size as the apartment he vacated; the convenience of living where he worked clearly became secondary to the goal of ownership of a detached, single-family home off Main Street. Likewise for druggist Jacob Furman and his wife Minnie. After twenty years above their storefront at 414 Main, they moved in 1954 into a new, one story residence with an attached garage at 10 Pruy n Place. Paul and Sylvia (Sherman) Tennenbaum, who worked in Sherman’s Fruit Store, moved from their apartment above the store in 1956 to a new house at 17 Grace Court. Pruy n Place and Grace Court were both new subdivisions on the hill on the east side of the village, Pruy n Place being developed from the Pruy n Estate. At their new homes, Conine, Furman, and Tennenbaum enjoyed living on a quiet side street with a private yard that did not have to be shared—as sidewalks do—with whomever happened by. The automobile allowed them to escape what has been called “the intensity of public life,” to tip the balance between public and private life much more heavily in favor of private life.⁴¹

Conine and Furman were not the last of the resident/merchants. However, resident/merchants now have become the exception. The 1958 Comprehensive Plan confirms the anecdotal evidence of the postwar residential exodus from Main Street. The most significant population decline of any area of the village between

1950 and 1958 occurred by far in the downtown area. Population there declined by 183 over those eight years, while the overall village population increased by 269. This demonstrated the incompatibility of mixing commercial and residential uses, noted the Comprehensive Plan.⁴²

In comparison, the fastest growing residential area in the fifties was on the west side of Catskill Creek, along Koeppel Avenue and adjacent streets. The 1958 Comprehensive plan reported 104 new homes built there between 1950 and 1958, and 300 new residents. Two new streets were dedicated by the village, Willis Avenue in 1949 and Orchard Avenue in 1952. Lands originally owned by the Koeppel family that proved unsuitable for housing, the “cow lots,” became the village park, which further oriented village residents to Catskill’s west side. These new developments of single-family housing in the area of Koeppel Avenue as well as the village park, were close to Route 9W and its budding commercial district. In an historic move, the A&P left Main Street to move to Route 9W in June 1954. It joined the new Catskill movie theater, Hamm Buick, and Sarro’s Drive-In. Local residents were now traveling to somewhere other than Main Street for groceries. By 1960, A&P was doubling the size of its store; before the decade’s end, a chain department store, Big Scott, was anchoring newly built Simmons Plaza on Route 9W. These new shopping centers were on the way home for Catskill residents commuting to work to points south. IBM in Kingston and two cement plants in Cementon expanded in the fifties and employed many Catskill residents.⁴³

All of this ultimately resulted in fewer cars on Main Street. Traffic counts were not recorded systematically over the decades, but some statistics are available, making observations possible. On Labor Day, 1925, 8,000 to 10,000 cars were reported coming through town. Certainly, summer months were the busiest; but equally as certain, traffic was as heavy at times, or heavier, in the twenties as it was forty years later. According to the 1958 Comprehensive Plan, the daily traffic count on Main Street during the previous five years was fairly steady at 6,000. The 1970 Comprehensive Plan reported little or no increase between 1960 and 1969. The rest of the information we have tells us that as shoppers were drawn to 9W and points further away, and as workers commuted more often to Albany and Kingston, there would have been a decrease in Main Street traffic in the years following the 1970 plan. Yet 1960 to 1975 was the time when parking lots were being built.⁴⁴

By the sixties, out-of-towners as well as locals looked off Main Street for their needs. The first of the Main Street hotels to close was the 20-room Catskill Hotel, at the corner of Church and Main, in May 1954. This left the Saulpaugh, south of downtown, and the Smith House, at the north end of Main Street. Wooden,

two stories tall in the early days of the village, and then three, the Smith House became known far and wide in the twentieth century for the elm tree that grew out of the dining room and through the roof. During Prohibition, “the bar was open” and government agents were mollified with fine food, bribes, and free liquor.⁴⁵

Between 1942 and 1958, the venerable establishment changed hands six times. The decline in out-of-town traffic made the operation of an old, twenty-two room hotel tenuous. Proprietor Luigi Caviglia tried to market it to locals looking for a night out. He advertised in the Friday editions of the local newspaper in the winter of 1954 to 1955: “The Amber Room of the Smith Arms Hotel; Dancing every Saturday nite from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. with Bob Cooper and his all new four piece band.”⁴⁶

Caviglia died running the hotel in 1958, as did his successor, Paul H. Berg, in 1962. On June 25, 1962, Mrs. Berg sold what she had renamed the Old Heidelberg Inn—after her native city in Germany—to Oneida Realty, Inc. The hotel was demolished and a concrete-block building was erected and opened as Oneida Markets, one of a chain of stores with nearby locations in Hudson, Cairo, and Hensonville. The new building was placed deep in the lot, backing on Water Street, inviting automobiles to park between it and Main Street. This is the only time on Main Street a building was built behind a parking lot, and the only time a parking lot was built on commercial speculation.⁴⁷

The chain grocery store had been on Main Street since the dawn of the automobile age. It changed things forever, in ways not apparent at the time. Grand Union and A&P drew customers away from the small grocers until the competition drained away. Oneida Markets and its shrink-wrapped meat was the death knell for Conine, whose shop was next door. Oneida, however, could not compete with A&P and Grand Union, now both on the west side. Oneida Markets lasted until 1969; ironically, it closed the same year as Conine’s meat market. With all major markets now off Main Street, even those shoppers within walking distance of downtown had to drive for their most elemental need—food. Gone were the days when an order for meat could be placed by phone with Bill Conine and delivered at no charge, the height of service and convenience.⁴⁸

Oneida Markets closed at a time when boom times on Main Street had passed. In 1970, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) sponsored the preparation of a new Comprehensive Development Plan for the village and made new recommendations for Main Street revitalization. Not enough buildings have been knocked down, said HUD. The central business district should be consolidated between Bridge and Church; to make sure this

consolidation took hold, Main Street buildings south of Bridge would be demolished in favor of a new county office complex. North of Church, more buildings would be demolished for a re-routing of Main Street. Bridge Street would be widened.⁴⁹

Increased parking was key to downtown Catskill's success. "A study of the parking in the Catskill business district shows that a substantial amount of new off-street parking space is required in order to improve the existing traffic flow and to encourage new or expanded development," the report said, but no further mention is made anywhere of the so-called "study of the parking." No evidence is given that anyone measured parking availability on weekdays, weeknights, or weekends, or collected any other type of data. Nor did the report suggest a return to diagonal parking along the west side of Main Street, which had increased on-street parking until it was discontinued well after World War II. No funding accompanied the plan and local government did nothing to implement it, at first.⁵⁰

Shortly after the report was issued, a confluence of circumstances produced the suggested increase in large parking lots, beginning with one at Bridge and Hill. After Grossmann and Ruf's discussion about the Knopler building on that day in 1970, Grossmann turned to Catskill National Bank, which agreed to finance an ambitious plan to buy a total of nine buildings on Bridge Street between Main and Water for the purpose of demolishing them.⁵¹

Grossmann, Ruf, and Winans took the properties in the name of a not-for-profit corporation they called Catskill Urban Rejuvenation Energies, or CURE. The targeted buildings included a storefront black church at 44 Bridge Street and a "sporting goods store" at 36 Bridge where the baseball gloves on display could never be purchased. (It was commonly known to be a front for a numbers operation and Friday night card games.) To the rear was an empty lot where the state armory once stood, adjacent space that also could be used for parking. The county government had purchased the 1889 local landmark in 1964 and torn it down the following year, but had not yet improved the lot for parking.⁵²

The sole holdout was Marie Galutch, who owned 40 Bridge Street and wanted \$1,200 more than CURE offered. (Her building stands today.) Demolition of the acquired buildings began on March 31, 1972. Ten families, all of them black, lost their homes. Claude and Floree Rose, who had been renting 78 Hill Street before it was torn down, also had once lived in Willard's Alley. For the second time in twelve years, parking lots were considered an improvement over black housing.⁵³

CURE planned to pay off the bank loan by selling the property to the village, which would then charge Main Street business owners a special assessment

through the establishment of a special district. Merchants would pay the extra tax on the theory that the vacant property could be used as a parking lot for new Main Street customers, thus generating revenue with which to offset the additional tax. The village board debated about the size of the district; village trustee and second-generation Main Street barber Joseph DiStefano wanted more demolition and a second parking lot north of Church as recommended in the HUD plan. Before the village board could move forward, the county government bought the lot, at CURE's cost, for use as parking and possible construction of a new county office complex there—as recommended in the 1970 HUD report. The adjacent, former armory lot also was blacktopped at this time.⁵⁴

The county government next rented and then purchased the former location of the VanDusen car dealership at Main and Livingston, and converted it into much-needed office space. Across the street stood the old Saulpaugh Hotel.

The largest of the Main Street hotels, the Saulpaugh advertised “100 rooms—60 with bath” after its \$200,000 renovation in 1926. Alex Grossmann moved from Binghamton in 1930 and opened the first office of Grossmann Insurance in the Saulpaugh. New York Telephone had its local office there; the Catskill Rotary met once a week; weddings and proms were celebrated. When I.B.M. officials came to Catskill after World War II to explore setting up a local plant, business leaders met them at the Saulpaugh. A different kind of business was run in the “horse room” in the basement level.⁵⁵

Sold out of the Saulpaugh family in 1958, a succession of owners with grand plans all went bust. By October 1974, the hotel was closed and purchased by Greene County; that December it was demolished. The hotel site was paved over and used by county employees for parking, the last lot built on Main Street until the relocation of county offices thirty years later to the downtown.⁵⁶

The long-discussed plans for the construction of a new Main Street county office building came closer to reality when the county legislature announced plans in 2001 to build on the site of the demolished Newberry department store. The footprint of the proposed building and adjacent parking required the razing of seven nineteenth-century buildings, including the former Episcopal Church designed by parishioner Thomas Cole. A lawsuit seeking an injunction against the demolition was dismissed; the dismissal was upheld by the appellate court in decisions that generated national attention, but the delay gave preservationists enough time to find a buyer for three of the threatened buildings and to convince the county to change that part of its plan. In 2004, the new county office building went up, along with Main Street's newest parking lots on its north and west sides.⁵⁷

Until this most recent Demolition to create space for the county building, obsolescence of an earlier use—and not the need for parking—had determined the location and size of every one of Main Street’s parking lots. The Willard’s Alley lot and the CURE lot were created primarily to beautify the village by removing old housing stock that had been home to blacks. Another lot was the result of a fire. For two more—the Smith House and Saulpaugh Hotel lots—parking was a ready, if unimaginative, alternative to maintaining large, aging, empty buildings. The construction of the Oneida Market and the development of the Newberry lots on Water Street were the only instances where off-street parking was created as an adjunct to a commercial enterprise. If the lack of parking was hurting Main Street, the armory lot would not have sat vacant but unused from 1965 to 1972.

Only one Main Street parking lot existed before 1958. Main Street was healthy for the first forty years of the automobile age—investments in new construction and improvements to existing buildings were made, merchants relocated from other upstate localities, consumers found a full complement of goods—without off-street parking. Local Catskillians were spatially focused. The shoppers who filled Main Street stores from the 1920s to the 1950s, making them profitable, lived and worked in or near Catskill, or vacationed nearby. Looking back, one longtime Greene County resident succinctly explained the success of Main Street in the postwar years: “It was the only place to shop.”⁵⁸

One particularly important sub-group of those who had once lived, worked, and shopped locally were the Main Street resident/merchants. Then in the 1950s, the butcher and the druggist moved away from Main Street into homes with yards and trees, just like the banker and the railroad owner of the last century. In contrast to the early days of the automobile, no more than two or three merchants lived on Main Street above their storefronts at any times during the past two decades. While some former resident/merchants kept their shops and still lived elsewhere in Catskill, the loss of their around-the-clock presence changed Main Street in a subtle but profound manner. Tenants moved in above the storefronts, but there was no connection between the workday inhabitants of the street and the evening inhabitants, as there had been when daytime and nighttime users were often the same people. “On successful city streets, people must appear at different times,” Jane Jacobs has observed. “All kinds of people can be present, but those who turn up for one reason at one time must not be sorted out in some totally incompatible fashion from those who turn up for another reason.” When the nighttime downtown becomes alien to the daytime users, those daytime users will spend their evenings and make their evening purchases elsewhere. Furthermore, with the departure of the resident/merchants, those who once

would have opposed the turning of streetscape into parking lots were gone. When downtown was no longer home, they would not need to worry about living next to a parking lot.⁵⁹

Main Street began to decline once improved automobile access to competition meant that its merchants no longer benefited from a spatially focused population. During the last third of the twentieth century, the parking lots were available but shoppers shopped in other places. There are many explanations for the choices shoppers make: other stores offer the same or similar items at less expense; people prefer shopping in new buildings to old buildings; other stores, banks, and supermarkets are on or near the transportation routes people take to work. The arrival of parking lots on Main Street did not change the decisions being made to shop elsewhere. Off-street parking came to symbolize not commerce, but a dearth of commerce.

The types of goods available on Main Street decreased; in 2007, a man's tie, a steak, a television, a best-selling book, or a baseball cannot be purchased on Main Street. Day and Holt Hardware closed in 2006, after almost two centuries, following the arrival of Wal-Mart on Catskill's west side. Yet today, foot traffic on Main Street is at a level not seen in decades. Specialty shops, most notably those selling home furnishings and fixtures, are benefiting from the synergy that comes from their close proximity to each other. Main Street is seeing new investment in the un-demolished nineteenth and early-twentieth landscape, as this generation becomes nostalgic for what prior generations abandoned.⁶⁰

Endnotes

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4. Richard Francaviglia, *Main Street Revisited* (Ames, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1996).
5. On early Catskill see: Beers, J.B. & Co., *History of Greene County* (Cornwallville, NY: Hope Farm Press reprint, originally published 1884), p. 124-125; Dorothy Kubik, *West Through the Catskills* (Fleischmanns, NY: Purple Mountain Press, 2001), pp. 73-77; and Field Horne, *The Greene County Catskills* (Hensonville, NY: Black Dome Press, 1994), pp. 35-36, 59.
6. Thomas Cole's early Catskill adventures are treated well in Alf Evers, *The Catskills: From Wilderness to Woodstock* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Press, 1972) pp. 372-77.
7. Horne, p. 24-25; Roland Van Zandt's *The Catskill Mountain House* (Hensonville, NY: Black Dome Press, 1966) is the definitive work.
8. Yesteryear, *Catskill Daily Mail*, December 7, 2003.

9. Map of Greene County, E.A. Balch, publisher (Philadelphia, 1856); collection of the author; Duany, Andres and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, *Towns and Town- Making Principles* (New York: Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 1991), pp. 21-22, 25-31; see also Duany, Andres, Plater-Zyberk, Elizabeth and Speck, Jeff, *Suburban Nation*, (New York: North Point Press, 2000) In all of the new towns designed by Duany and Plater-Zyberk, apartments overtop street-level storefronts; Dunn, Shirley, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory & Nomination :East Side Historic District, Catskill, Greene County, NY* (1979), p. 3. The other Main Street building between Bridge and Church built as a residence is at the corner of William and Main Street.
10. Warner, Sam Bass *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston (1870 – 1900)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 13; Foner, Eric *Paine's Philadelphia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 23; Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) p. 57; Kunstler, James *The Geography of Nowhere* (New York: Touchstone, 1993), pp. 41-43; Gallt, J.A. *Dear Old Greene County* (Hope Farm Press reprint, originally published 1915), p. 506; Beecher, Ray, "The Thomsons of Catskill Landing" *Greene County Historical Journal*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1996); Van Zandt, pp. 31, 33.
11. Yesteryear, *Catskill Daily Mail*, January 25, 2004; undated conversation with Florence Hunter, who lived at 252 Jefferson Heights and told me it was built in 1914; Beecher, Ray "Let the Trolleys Come," *Greene County Historical Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1 and 2 (1986); St. Patrick's Catholic Church, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Washington Irving Elementary School, and Grandview Elementary school were all built in residential areas between 1880 and 1905.
12. Craigie, F.R., editor, *The Greene County Directory*, 1917.
13. New York State Department of Motor Vehicles, *Registrations, Greene County, 1921 to 2000; 1917 Greene County Directory* and Manning's *Catskill, Coxsackie, Athens and Cairo 1930 Directory*.
14. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Characteristics, 1910, 1920, 1930*, New York State Library; 1917 *Greene County Directory* and Manning's *1930 Directory*.
15. Conversation with Ray Beecher, *Greene County Historian*, February 8, 2002. Beecher lived in Greenville as a teenager from 1928-1934; 1917 *Greene County Directory* and Manning's *1930 Directory*.
16. Beecher, "Let the Trolleys Come."
17. Ringwald, D.C. *Hudson River Day Line* (Berkeley, CA: Howell-North Books, 1965); DuBois, Philip A *Catskills Boyhood* (Hensonville, NY: Black Done Press, 1992), p. 17.
18. Conversation of March 29, 1999, with Joseph Sausto, grandson of the "original" Joseph Sausto; undated conversation with Everett Roberts, son of Charles Roberts; conversation with John Winans, Hattie Brand Field's grandson, October 12, 2004; Greenville Press, February 19, 2004, June 10, 2004; *New York Times*; "Where Summer Just Isn't What It Used to Be," July 31, 2002; Census Records, New York State Library.
19. New York State Department of Public Works, plans filed at New York State Department of Transportation, Cairo, New York.
20. *Catskill Examiner*, August 14, 1930.
21. Ibid; conversation with Grossmann, January, 2000; obituary of Earl H. Winans in the *Catskill Daily Mail*, September 12, 1960.
22. *Catskill Daily Mail*, January 15, 1935; Raymond May Associates *Village of Catskill: Comprehensive Development Plan Part II* (White Plains, NY: August 15, 1958), map of existing land use following p. 50; *Catskill Daily Mail*, July 30, 1936.
23. *Catskill Daily Mail*, February 26, 1955; April 19, 1958; April 6, 1960; May 7, 1960; Greenville Press, April 18, 2004.
24. *Catskill Daily Mail*, October 26, 1954; January 4, 1955; January 5, 1955; January 22, 1955; Beecher, Ray "Greene County's Horse Ferries" *Greene County Historical Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 13 (1984).

25. 1958 Comprehensive Plan, pp. 8 and 23.
26. New York State Department of Public Works, plans filed at New York State Department of Transportation, Cairo, New York.
27. Deed from Mrs. Branch to Catskill Savings Bank, Liber 364, p. 170, Greene County Clerk's Office.
28. Deed from Mrs. Goodrich to Catskill Savings Bank dated October 28, 1962, Liber 410, p. 675, Greene County Clerk's Office.
29. *Catskill Daily Mail*, February 26, 1955.
30. 1889 Sanborn Map, Drawer 7, Vedder Memorial Library, Coxsackie, New York; 1905 Census Records, Enumeration of Residents of Catskill Election District #2, pp. 5 and 6 and 1915 Census Records, Catskill Election District #2, pp. 8 and 9, filed at the Greene County Clerk's office.
31. Conversations with Charles Hawshaw, July 20, 2004, and Mrs. Mary Wilburn, October 29, 2004. Both were Alley residents and Macon natives; conversations with Eugene Heath, son of Wyman Heath and nephew of Moses Heath, and Charles Swain, Greene County minority historian, and grandson of Macon, Georgia, natives, March, 2004; photograph of Hudson Valley Volunteer Fireman's Association Parade courtesy of Catskill Volunteer Fire Company; 1925 Census Record, Catskill Election District #2, p. 1. Warrenton, Georgia, was the birthplace of the Heath brothers.
32. 1925 Census Record, Catskill Election District #2, p. 1; conversations with Hawshaw and Wilburn; conversation with Marlene Fischer, November 3, 2005. Marlene's mother, Sylvia, was David and Abraham's sister; conversation with Frances Heath, former alley resident, September 19, 2007.
33. Fried, Dennis A *Tongue in the Sink* (Osprey, Florida: Eiffel Press, 2004), pp. 30-31.
34. Conversations with Hawshaw and Wilburn; conversation with Dr. DuBois Jenkins, April, 2007. Jenkins was a veterinarian with an office adjacent to the alley from 1946 to 1958.
35. Conversation with Frances Heath; conversation with Harvey Durham, September 25, 2007, on the state of central heating in the county in the 1950s.
36. Conversation with Hawshaw and Frances Heath; 1958 Comprehensive Plan, map opposite p. 27.
37. *Catskill Daily Mail*, January 7, 1955; March 12, 1955; April 19, 1958; Laws of New York, 1955. *Catskill Examiner-Recorder*, July 31, 1958; *Catskill Daily Mail*, October 11, 1958; conversations with Hawshaw and Wilburn.
38. *Catskill Daily Mail*, August 4, 1960; Deeds recorded at Greene County Clerk's office at Liber 384, p. 187-196; Liber 385, p. 25, 171, and 380; Liber 386; p. 195; Liber 390, p. 408; "Willard's Alley Renewal Project", Map Drawer 7E, Vedder Memorial Library, Coxsackie, New York.
39. *Catskill Daily Mail*, April 29, 1955; April 21, 1958; April 4, 1960. By 1964, the Cornell Hook and Ladder minstrel show featured white performers with cosmetic white faces! See photograph collection of Cornell Hook and Ladder, New Baltimore. The *Catskill Daily Mail* of August 14, 1956 reported "an enthusiastic audience of 450" attended a recent benefit for the Greenville church. The Knights of Columbus show would be appearing next in Phelan's Hotel in Leeds for the benefit of St. Bridget's, the paper announced.
40. *Polk's Catskill Directory*, 1960; census records 1960; 1958 Comprehensive Plan.
41. Conversation with Bill Conine, son of William and Mabel Conine, April 29, 2002; Conversations with Cybil Furman Tannenbaum, August 2002, and Marlene Fischer, November 23, 2005; Conine deed recorded September 1, 1953, at Liber 334, p. 177 of the Greene County Clerk's Office; Furman deeds recorded June 9, 1954 at Liber 337, pp. 68 and 69 at Greene County Clerk's Office; Gruen, Victor *The Heart of Our Cities* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), p. 28; *Catskill Daily Mail*, April 5, 1960; 2 Wildwing Park was 1,177 square feet in size, not counting the garage. There is slightly more living space than in the apartment above the meat market. The

two apartments and the common space on the second floor above 479 Main Street total 1,700 square feet. Town of Catskill Assessor's office, Files #155.12-1-24 and 156.70-2-9.

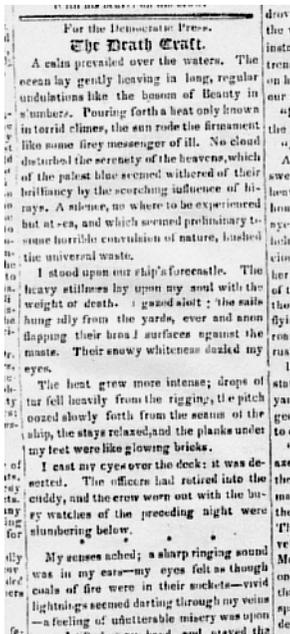
42. 1958 Comprehensive Plan, p. 31.
43. 1958 Comprehensive Plan, pp. 8, 28, 31; *Catskill Daily Mail*, March 23, 1955; April 9, 1958; May 16, 1960. The Kingston IBM was advertising for assembly line workers and secretaries in the May 6, 1955, *Catskill Daily Mail*; Catskill Village Board Book of Minutes, April 19, 1949, and October 14, 1952.
44. Horne, p. 182; 1958 Comprehensive Plan, pp. 6, 54; Raymond, Parish and Pine, Inc. *Village of Catskill: Comprehensive Development Plan* (June 1970), p. 156.
45. *Greenville Press*, May 20, 2004; Conversation with Harold Kleinberg, May 1, 2002.
46. Deeds recorded at Greene County Clerk's office; *Catskill Daily Mail*, January and February, 1955.
47. Deeds recorded at the Greene County Clerk's Office.
48. The significance of the food stores moving to the west side was noted by long-time Catskill resident and town historian Betty Larsen; 1958 Comprehensive Plan, p. 12; Deeds recorded at the Greene County Clerk's Office; conversation with Conine.
49. Comprehensive Plan for the Village of Catskill, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1970.
50. Ibid.
51. Conversation with Grossmann.
52. Conversation with Grossmann; *Catskill Daily Mail*, March 22, 1971; June 6, 1972; Edwin G. Grossmann personal papers. Gene Heath recalled 36 Bridge Street on February 2, 2005.
53. Grossmann papers; conversation with Mrs. Rose, July 22, 2005.
54. Grossmann papers.
55. *Catskill Daily Mail* article, undated; Saulpaugh Hotel subject matter file, Vedder Memorial Library, Coxsackie, NY; conversation with Grossmann.
56. Deed recorded at Greene County Clerk's Office; *Catskill Daily Mail*, March 24, 1970; photographs, collection of Harold Post, Catskill.
57. Greene County Clerk's Office, Index #01-601, *Save Our Main Street Buildings vs. Greene County Legislature and Greene County*.
58. Conversation with Loris Alex, August 21, 2007.
59. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of American Cities*, p. 198.
60. A good academic treatment of the factors affecting the distance a shopper will travel can be found in Berger, R. M. *The Most Necessary Luxuries* (Penn State Press, 1993). In part, Professor Berger says (at pp. 49-50) "Several factors affect the distance a shopper will travel. These include the type of product being sought, the attractiveness of prices at competing outlets, the difficulty of the trip, and the availability of transport. Such factors as the ready availability of merchandise and credit facilities, convenience, the location of competitors, and customer service also affect marketing patterns. In addition, the consumer's awareness, habits, willingness to bear the costs of an extended search, and desire for a particular commodity, together with the number of trips necessary, will all be telling. A consumer might visit a single distant urban center with high prices rather than go to several nearby but dispersed shops—even those with low prices—because, despite higher search costs, there will be more choice... Consumers will also travel far afield for goods when the shopping trip itself has some entertainment value."

“Its Snowy Whiteness Dazzled My Eyes”
 Melville’s Early Attempt
 at Gothic Horror

Warren F. Broderick

On November 16, 1839, a story entitled “The Death Craft” appeared on the first page of the weekly newspaper, the *Democratic Press (and Lansingburgh Advertiser)*. This somewhat amateurish attempt at achieving Gothic horror would be of little interest to the modern reader were there not conclusive evidence that “The Death Craft” was the first maritime story, the first Gothic fiction, of Herman Melville.

The Melville family had moved to the Village of Lansingburgh, where this newspaper was published, in the spring of 1838. Maria Melville, Herman’s mother, left Albany with her eight children to reduce her living expenses. Lansingburgh, a village of some 3,000 inhabitants, is situated ten miles north along the east side of the Hudson River in Rensselaer County, opposite the mouth of the Mohawk River. (Today it is part of the City of Troy.) Maria rented a home from gunmaker John M. Caswell, a residence “very pleasantly situated” near the river bank and the



corner of North and River Streets (presently named 114th Street and First Avenue, respectively).¹ Directly adjacent to their home was the Richard Hanford shipyard, one of the remaining elements of an active shipbuilding industry and river commerce that had precipitated Lansingburgh’s rapid growth since its founding as a planned community in 1771.

In the autumn of 1838, Herman, at the age of nineteen, entered Lansingburgh Academy, one of the better-regarded upstate private schools, located three blocks east of his home. Hoping to secure a position with the state-operated Erie Canal, he took a course in Surveying and Engineering, which he completed the following May. His mentor, Principal Ebenezer D. Maltbie (1799-1858), held a particular interest in zoology, later authoring the textbook *Zoological*

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THE DEATH CRAFT

A calm prevailed over the waters. The ocean lay gently heaving in long, regular undulations like the bosom of Beauty in slumber. Pouring forth a heat only known in torrid climes, the sun rode the firmament like some fiery messenger of ill. No cloud disturbed the serenity of the heavens, which, of the palest blue, seemed withered of their brilliancy by the scorching influence of his rays. A silence, nowhere to be experienced but at sea, and which seemed preliminary to some horrible convulsion of nature, hushed the universal waste.

I stood upon the ship's forecastle. The heavy stillness lay on my soul with the weight of death. I gazed aloft; the sails hung idly from the yards, ever and anon flapping their broad surfaces against the masts. Their snowy whiteness dazzled my eyes.

The heat grew more intense; drops of tar fell heavily from the rigging; the pitch oozed slowly forth from the seams of the ship, the stays relaxed; and the planks under my feet were like glowing bricks.

I cast my eyes over the deck, it was deserted. The officers had retired into the cuddy, and the crew, worn out with the busy watches of the preceding night, were slumbering below.

My senses ached; a sharp ringing sound was in my ears—my eyes felt as though coals of fire were in their sockets—vivid lightnings seemed darting through my veins—a feeling of unutterably misery was upon me. I lifted my hands and prayed to the God of the Winds to send them over the bosom of the deep; Vain prayer! The sound of my voice pierced my brain, and reeling for a moment in agony, I sunk upon the deck.

I recovered and, rising with difficulty, tottered towards the cabin; as I passed under the helm, my eyes fell upon the helmsman lying athwart-ships abaft the wheel. The glazed eye, the distended jaw, the clammy hand were not enough to assure my stupified senses. I stooped over the body—Oh God! It exhaled the odour of the dead—and there, banqueting on putrifying corpse, were the crawling denizens of the tomb! I watched their loathsome motions; the spell was upon me—I could not shut out the horrid vision; I saw them devour, Oh God! how greedily, their human meal!

A heavy hand was laid upon my shoulder—a loud laugh rung in my ear, it was the Mate. “See, See!”—“THE DEATH CRAFT!” He sprang away from me with one giant bound, and with a long long shriek, that even now haunts me,

wildly flung himself into the sea.

Great God! there she lay, covered with barnacles, the formation of years—he sails unbent—a blood-red flag steaming from her mast-head—at her jib-boom-end dangling suspended by its long, dark hair, a human head covered with congelated gore and firmly gripping, between its teeth a rusty cutlass! Her yards were painted black, and at each of her arms hung dangling a human skeleton, whiter than polished ivory and glistening in the fierce rays of the sun!

I shrieked aloud: “Blast—blast my vision, Oh God! Blast it ere I rave;”—I buried my face in my hands—I pressed them wildly against my eyes;—for a moment I was calm—I had been wandering—it was some awful dream. I looked—the ghastly appendage at the jib-boom seemed fixing its ghastly eyeballs on me—each chalky remnant of mortality seemed beckoning me toward it! I fancied them clutching me in their wild embrace—I saw them begin their infernal orgies;—the flesh crisped upon my fingers, my heart grew icy cold, and faint with terror and despair, I lay prostrate upon the deck.

How long that trance endured, I know not; but at length I revived. The wind howled angry around me; the thunder boomed over the surface of the deep; the rain fell in torrents, and the lightning, as it flashed along the sky, showed the full horrors of the storm. Wave after wave came, thundering against the ship’s counter over which I lay, and flung themselves in showering seas over our devoted barque. Sailors were continually hurrying by me; in vain I implored them not to carry me below, they heard me not. Some were aloft taking in sail—four were on the main-top-gallant-yard-arm—a squall quick as lightning struck the vessel, took her all aback, whipping the canvass into ribbands, and with a loud crash sending overboard the main-mast. I heard the shrieks of those dying wretches, saw them clinging for a moment to the spar, then struggling for an instant with the waters, when an enormous wave bounding towards them, with its milk-white crest tossed high in the air, obscured them from my view. They were seen no more; they fed the finny tribes.

The ship with her hull high out of the water, her bowsprit almost perpendicular, and her taffrail wholly immersed in the sea, drove for a moment stern-foremost though the waters, when the wind shifting for an instant to the starboard quarter she made a tremendous lurch to port, and lay trembling on her beam-ends. That moment decided our fate.

“Keep her before the wind,” thundered the Captain.

“Aye, aye, Sir!”

And docile as the managed steed she swerved aside, and once more sent the spray heaving from her bows! 'Twas an awful hour. Had the ship hesitated a second—aye, the fraction of one, in obeying her helm she would have gone to fill the rapacious maw of the deep. As it was, with her larboard side encumbered with the wreck of the mainmast, her coursers rent into a thousand tatters, her sheers and crew lines flying in the wind which ran whistling and roaring through her rigging, she seemed rushing forward to swift destruction.

I looked forward; in the chains were stationed men standing by to part the landyards; while with axe uplifted stood an aged seaman prepared at an instant's warning to cut away the foremast.

"Cut away!" vociferated the skipper. The axe descended with the speed of thought—and shroud sprang violently up, till the lofty mast, yielding like some lofty hemlock to the woodsman, fell heavily by the board.—The ship eased still driving with fearful velocity before the wind. "Where's the Mate?" hoarsely inquired the Captain. No one answered, no one knew, but me. At that moment I lay clinging to one of the spare yards that were lashed around the deck. With a preternatural effort, I raised myself, and pointing to the foaming surface of the deep, I shrieked—"There—there!" The frightful apparition I had witnessed now flashed across my mind, and once more with the laugh of wild delirium I rolled upon the deck.

A gentle breeze lifted the locks from my brow; a delicious sensation thrilled through my veins; my eyes opened—the glorious main lay expanding before me, bright and beautiful and blue! I strove to speak; a rosy finger was laid upon my lips—a form of an angel hovered over me. I yielded to the sweet injunction; a delightful languor stole over my senses; visions of heavenly beauty danced around me, and I peacefully slumbered.

Again I awoke; my God! did I dream? Was this my own fair room? Were these the scenes of my youth? No, no! They were far across the bounding deep! The horrors I had witnessed had distracted my brain; I closed my eyes; I tried to regain my thoughts, to recollect myself. Once more the same sweet objects were before me; two lovely eyes were upon me, and the fond young girl whom twelve months ago, I had left a disconsolate bride, lay weeping in my arms

—*Harry The Reefer*



View of the Lansingburgh waterfront by John Barber

Science, or Nature in Living Forms (1858).² The possibility of Rev. Maltbie's tutoring young Melville on the wonderful variety of the animal kingdom tantalizes the Melville biographer, considering Herman's passionate interest in natural science, manifested in many of his works, including the early chapters of *Moby Dick*.

Melville's social circle in Lansingburgh was comprised of some friends and relatives of considerable education, refinement, and diverse interests. The community was neither the "quiet country village" nor totally "Philistine in spirit" and of a "strictly business character" as it has been characterized by some Melville biographers and critics in the past.³ In particular, Herman's contemporaries who were travelers, writers, or publishers deserve a brief mention. Given Melville's circle of relatives and friends in a busy commercial village along the Hudson River, his burgeoning interest in both travel and authorship is not surprising in the least.

Anthony Augustus Peebles (1822-1905), a second cousin of Melville's, traveled abroad, served in the diplomatic corps, and read extensively; he was once engaged to Herman's sister, Augusta Melville. Anthony's wife, Mary Louisa [Parmelee] Peebles (1834-1915), authored a number of popular children's books under the pseudonym Lynde Palmer. Anthony's mother, Maria [Van Schaick] Peebles (1782-1865), was one of the relatives who provided Maria Melville with much-needed financial assistance. (Maria Melville had removed her family from Albany to Lansingburgh in part because members of the Peebles and Van Schaick families lived there.) Augustus Platt Van Schaick (1822-1847), also a second cousin of Herman's, was another overseas traveler and "author of many figurative pieces, descriptive, religious and humorous."⁴ Two of Melville's 1847 letters to Augustus survive; one had accompanied an autographed copy of the newly released novel *Omoo*.⁵

Herman's friends included Hiram R. Hawkins (1827-1866), a shipbuilder's son, adventurer, and sailor who twice mentioned Melville in an 1849 letter written from Honolulu, defending Herman's caustic criticism of the South Sea missionaries.⁶ Hawkins lived a block south of the Melvilles on River Street. Peletiah Bliss (1821-1852) was a local newspaper and book publisher, as well as a world traveler. Peletiah's wife, Mary Eleanor [Parmelee] Bliss (1822-1896), was courted by Melville, being the recipient of a volume of Tennyson's poems and some since-destroyed love letters. Her older brother, Elias R. Parmelee (1799-1849), was an avid disciple of universal public education, contributing extensively to newspapers and magazines on that subject; he was the father of Mary Louisa [Parmelee] Peebles, mentioned above.

Another friend of Melville's was William J. Lamb (1818-1859), progressive editor of the *Democratic Press (and Lansingburgh Advertiser)*, later known as the *Lansingburgh Democrat*, who devoted greater coverage in his paper than most contemporary editors to local events as well as the arts and belles lettres. Ironically, Lamb's principal business competitor was the publisher of the *Lansingburgh Gazette*, none other than Peletiah Bliss, Herman's rival for the affections of Mary Eleanor Parmelee. In April 1839, Lamb received a communication from Melville, and after requesting an interview with the young writer (who had previously submitted a sample of his writing) he published Herman's first piece of fiction in the weekly



The Melville House, Lansingburgh

newspaper.⁸ Herman may already have submitted five poems to his newspaper; these poems, all signed “H,” appeared in the *Democratic Press* between September 1838 and April 1839.⁹ Two of them appear to have been written for Mary Eleanor Parmelee.

The first of two “Fragments from a Writing Desk” of Melville’s appeared in the *Democratic Press* on May 4, 1839, signed “L.A.V.” The first was written in the form of a confessional letter to his mentor by a cocky young disciple of Lord Chesterfield. Much of the piece is devoted to a glowing description of Lansingburgh’s young women, the remainder to the details of the methods by which the narrator planned to court them. Far more interesting is the second “Fragment,” published two weeks later, which recalls a bizarre romantic adventure in pursuit of a mysterious woman, who upon a passionate confrontation is revealed to the hero as being “dumb and deaf!”¹⁰ This piece, as Gilman astutely noted, reveals how already extensive was Melville’s reading.¹¹

The “Fragments” were discovered among Melville’s papers in 1919 by Raymond Weaver.¹² They bear the words “by Herman Melville” in faded ink that was later proven to be from the pen of Herman’s wife. There is no sound reason to doubt Melville’s authorship. “Although the sketches are scarcely immortal literature,” Gilman commented, “the mere fact that they were published was an achievement for Melville.”¹³ A month after their publication, the nineteen-year-old author embarked for Liverpool on his first sea voyage, on the ship *St. Lawrence*, bound from the Port of New York; he returned home on the *United States* that October, nursing vivid recollections of the beauty and cruelty of life at sea that ten years later would form the basis for his novel *Redburn*, very likely a highly autobiographical work. The poverty that Herman witnessed in Great Britain as well as the harsh treatment received by sailors no doubt added to his growing sense of cynicism and disillusionment.¹⁴

Melville apparently soon turned to synthesizing his fresh maritime experiences with his desire to compose Gothic fiction upon his return. “The Death Craft” was discovered by one of the three Melville biographers and critics—Jay Leyda, William Gilman, or Leon Howard. Each conducted extensive research on Melville during the late 1940s. Which of them actually “discovered” it is not known for certain. Once the “Fragments” had been positively documented as being from Melville’s hand, based on the marginal annotation made by his widow, it seems logical that scholars of this stature would search the local newspapers for other possible contributions.

Leyda reproduced the sketch in part in his *Melville Log*, indicating the probability that Melville was the author.¹⁵ Gilman stated that he felt it “possible

but unlikely” that Melville had composed the piece, labeling it “full of Gothic horror, unreal description, and sticky romance.” But Gilman should have seen that “The Death Craft” was no more amateurish and melodramatic than the “Fragments,” which had been composed only a few months earlier.¹⁶ Howard, on the other hand, saw “The Death Craft” as containing “a raw exhibition of the sort of fancies Melville was to introduce so skillfully, many years later, into ‘Benito Cereno.’” Howard, however, saw “The Death Craft” as “less personally revealing than the ‘Fragments.’”¹⁷ Harry Levin called it “a youthful sketch, one of Melville’s first publications” that “conjures up a Poe-like vision of horror which reappears in *Redburn* and is transmuted in ‘Benito Cereno.’”¹⁸

The next Melville scholar to seriously study “The Death Craft” was Martin L. Pops, who treated the piece in some detail in his 1970 study, *The Melville Archetype*. In his typically Freudian but nevertheless rather lively and intuitive study of Melville, Pops recognized the strong similarities between Melville’s later fiction and “The Death Craft” and stated that the latter was “undoubtedly” from Herman’s pen. Pops astutely noted that “certainly the nautical language is deliberately technical, as if, by use of a terminology too complex for ordinary landlubbers to fathom, the pseudonymous author were parading his own seaworthiness—not to say his newly acquired vocabulary.”¹⁹

The next treatment of “The Death Craft” appeared as a brief analysis I submitted as part of a graduate school degree requirement for the Spring 1973 issue of *The Idol*, a literary magazine published by Union College.²⁰ I subsequently expanded on the same subject in “‘Their Snowy Whiteness Dazzled My Eyes’: ‘The Death Craft’—Melville’s First Maritime Story” in the March 1986 issue of *The Hudson Valley Regional Review*.²¹ My earlier article, which formed the basis for this one, according to Laurie Robertson-Lorant “argues convincingly in favor of the attribution” to Melville.²²

In volume 1 of *Herman Melville: A Biography*, Hershel Parker takes the position that “there is no reason [“The Death Craft”] could not have been [by Melville] and no reason to think no one else could have written it.” Parker does quote the short story in part and comments that “the prose is conventionally sensational,” no worse than Herman had written in the spring. Robertson-Lorant in *Melville: A Biography* comments that “as crude as it is, ‘The Death Craft’ has some affinities with ‘Benito Cereno,’ a later Melville masterpiece.” She also notices the similarities between “The Death Craft” and the “Fragments.” Edwin Haviland Miller quotes the story in part and asserts without equivocation that it is Melville’s work. More recently, biographer Andrew Delbanco refers to the story as “another bit of Gothic fluff,” while Carl Rollyson and Lisa Paddock refer to the

story as “a highly stylized piece of marine Gothic” by Melville.²³

Some critics fail to mention “The Death Craft” at all. One cannot be certain if these scholars were aware of the story but dismissed it, or whether they ever read it at all. The latter supposition might explain its omission from studies such as Max Putzel’s 1962 article, “The Source and Symbols of Melville’s ‘Benito Cereno.’”²⁴ In my opinion, “The Death Craft” clearly represents Melville’s first attempt at translating his sea adventures into fiction. Parts of the story, especially the brilliant first paragraph, read smoothly, while others are choppy and filled with overblown scenes of horror. The conclusion, like that of the second “Fragment,” is highly melodramatic. Nonetheless, Melville’s command of metaphor and apostrophe in the sketch are strikingly powerful for a twenty-year-old inexperienced author. They foreshadow both the memorable imagery and declamation that are found in his later works.

The opening paragraph of “The Death Craft” bears a remarkable resemblance to the third paragraph in “Benito Cereno”:

A calm prevailed over the waters. The ocean lay gently heaving in long, regular undulations like the bosom of Beauty in slumber. Pouring forth a heat only known in torrid climes, the sun rode the firmament like some fiery messenger of ill. No cloud disturbed the serenity of the heavens, which, of the palest blue, seemed withered of their brilliancy by the scorching influence of his rays. A silence, nowhere to be experienced but at sea, and which seemed preliminary to some horrible convulsion of nature, hushed the universal waste. (“The Death Craft”)

Everything was mute and calm, everything gray. The sea, though undulated into long roods of swells, seemed foxed, and was sleeked at the surface like waved lead that had cooled and set in the smelter’s mold. The sky seemed like a gray surtout. Flights of troubled gray vapors among which they were mixed, skimmed low and fitfully over the waters, as swallows over meadows before storms. Shadows present, foreshadow deeper shadows to come. (“Benito Cereno,” chapter 1)²⁵

The plot of “Benito Cereno” was taken from the 1817 narrative of Captain Amasa Delano. No such beautiful prose can be found in this terse work; Melville’s source for this paragraph was doubtless the first paragraph of “The Death Craft,” written sixteen years earlier.²⁶ Here Melville introduced the fascinating concept of the “awful calm,” often associated with horrific qualities of grayness, which is found a number of times in his later works. Again in chapter two of “Benito Cereno,” Melville remarked that the *San Dominick*, after narrowly escaping a ship-

wreck off Cape Horn, “for days together . . . had lain tranced without wind; their provisions were low; their water next to none; their lips . . . were baked.” Later in chapter seven, “at noon . . . the grayness of everything” made it seem to be “getting toward dusk.” “The calm was confirmed . . . the leaded ocean seemed laid out . . . its course finished, soul gone, defunct.”

In the interim before “Benito Cereno” had been composed, Melville had twice described the “awful stillness of the calm” in *Mardi* (1849). In chapter two, the narrator devotes three pages to detailing his “witnessing as a landsman the phenomenon of the sea.” The calm “unsettles his mind . . . thoughts of eternity thicken . . . his voice grows strange and portentous . . . he begins to feel anxious concerning his soul.” In chapter sixteen, the ship is again becalmed:

the Ocean upon its surface hardly presents a sea of existence. The deep blue is gone, and the glassy element lies tranced, almost viewless as the air . . . Everything was fused into the calm, sky, air, water, and all . . . this inert blending and brooding of all things seemed gray chaos in conception.

The writer refers to his ship when being pounded by “showering seas” as our “devoted barque.” In chapter 138 of *Mardi*, King Piko’s empire is said to have been “devoted.” In both cases, Melville may be using a now obsolete meaning of the word “devoted,” as synonymous with “fated” or “cursed.”

In both “The Death Craft” and *Mardi*, the heat grew more “intense” during the calm. The narrator of both reeled in dizziness from the heat, which relaxed the stays of the vessel in Melville’s sketch and warped the upper planks of the ship in his novel. In “The Death Craft,” the narrator “prayed the God of the winds to send them over the bosom of the deep” to relieve the frightening calm, but this was a “vain prayer!” In chapter two of *Mardi*, the narrator remarks, “Vain the idea of idling out the calm . . . succor or sympathy there is none. Penitence for embarking avails not.”

The phrase “vain prayer” suggests that Melville had this early in life begun to express some disillusionment with the God he had been taught to worship. In its first paragraph, Herman had noted that the “heavens . . . of the palest blue, seemed withered of their brilliancy . . .” Lawrance Thompson devoted an entire chapter in Melville’s *Quarrel with God* to analyzing the “disillusionment” he expressed in *Redburn*. Thompson conjectured, maybe rightly so, that Herman’s first taste of disillusionment with God came as a result of the experiences of his first sea voyage—expressed not only in the autobiographical *Redburn* but also in his first composition written upon his return home, “The Death Craft.”²⁷

In chapter two of *Typee*, Tommo “tried to shake off the spell” of the “general languor” of a calm. “The dirge-like swell of the Pacific came rolling along... a shapeless monster of the deep, floating on the surface ... [and] the most impressive feature of the scene was the almost unbroken silence that reigned over the sky and water.”

“Toward noon a dead calm” arrived in chapter twenty of *Omoo*, and a calm is twice associated with calamity in *Moby Dick*. In chapter eighty-seven, Ishmael remarks that they were “now in that enchanted calm which they say lurks in the heart of every commotion.” In chapter 114, he remarks:

“Would to God that these blessed calms would last. But the mingled, mingling threads of life are woven by warp and woof: calms crossed by storms, a storm for every calm.”

The threatening and evil connotations of a calm at sea are mentioned at least five times in *White Jacket*. In chapter twenty-six, White Jacket remarks that “especially terrifying” was the “treacherous calm preceding” a storm at night. It was during a calm in chapter seventy-seven that a man dies in “sick-bay,” his death hastened by the “intense” heat: “Had it only been a gale instead of a calm... a serene, passive foe unrelenting, irresistible... unconquered to the last.” Three chapters later, the sailor Shenley finally dies when “the heat of the night calm was intense.” The ship’s bell, tolling through the calm, forecast the man’s moment of death:

“Poor Shenley! thought I, that sounds like your knell! and here you lie becalmed, in the last calm of all!”

In the final chapter, White Jacket recalls all the trials and suffering the sailors had endured during the now concluded voyage, one of them being “tranced in the last calm.” During that terrifying calm, “the heat was excessive; the sun drew the tar from the seams of the ship.” During the calm in “The Death Craft,” similarly “the heat grew more intense; drops of tar fell heavily from the rigging, the pitch oozed slowly forth from the seams of the ship.”

The ghost ship, the central image of the sketch, is a staple of marine legend, of which Melville seems to have been particularly fond. Twice they are encountered in *Redburn*. First, in chapter nineteen, the *Highlander* is brushed by a “strange ship,” which “shot off into the darkness” after the near collision. “No doubt many ships,” Redburn remarks, “that are never heard of... mutually destroy each other; and like fighting elks, sink down into the ocean, with their antlers locked in death.” In chapter twenty-two, the *Highlander* passes the floating wreck of

a “dismantled water-logged schooner, a most dismal sight, that must have been drifting about for several weeks.” Bodies of three sailors, “dead a long time,” were found lashed to the taffrail. In fact, Jackson referred to this vessel as “a sailor’s coffin.” “Full of the awful interest of the scene” (much like the narrator, “faint with terror and despair” upon a close look at the “Death Craft”), Wellingborough Redburn was “amazed and shocked” at his captain and fellow sailors’ indifference to the dead. The *Highlander* sailed away, leaving the schooner “a garden spot for barnacles, and a playhouse for the sharks.” The schooner had apparently been a “New Brunswick lumberman,” one of its most striking features being “the foremast . . . snap off [near] its base, the shattered and splintered remnant looking like the stump of a pine tree in the woods.” To save the narrator’s vessel from sinking from its collision with “The Death Craft,” an aged seaman took an axe to the “lofty mast, yielding like some lofty hemlock to the woodsman . . .”

A deadly ghost ship is likewise described in Melville’s poem “The Aeolian Harp”:

It has drifted, waterlogged
 Till by trailing weeds beclogged;
 Drifted, drifted, day by day
 Pilotless on pathless way.
 It has drifted till each plank
 Is oozy as the oyster bank;
 Drifted, drifted, night by night
 Craft that never shows a light;
 Nor ever, to prevent worse knell,
 Tools in fog the warning bell.
 For collision never shrinking,
 Drive what may through darksome smother;
 Saturate, but never sinking,
 Fatal only to the other!

The unspeakable horrors of confronting a ghost ship at sea (“Well the harp of Ariel wails / thoughts that tongue can tell no word of!”) brings to mind the narrator’s inability to speak when asked the whereabouts of the Mate in “The Death Craft.” The “angry howl” of the wind that accompanied the gale following the appearance of the “Death Craft” is not unlike the wail of the wind passing through the “Aeolian Harp”:

Stirred by fitful gales from sea:
 Shrieking up in mad crescendo—

In Chapter four of *Typee*, Tommo remarks he has heard of a whaler, named ironically, *The Perseverance*, “which after many years’ absence was given up as lost,” and resembled a ghost ship even though it was manned by “some twenty . . . old salts, who managed just to hobble about deck.” “Her hull was encrusted with barnacles” like the “Death Craft” (“covered with barnacles, the formation of years”), and “remembrance of this vessel always haunted” the seeker-narrator, Tommo.

The brigantine boarded in chapter twenty of *Mardi* possesses numerous qualities of a ghost ship; that there were spirits on board “seemed a dead certainty.” The sinking *Pequod* in chapter 125 of *Moby Dick* is declared by Ahab to be a “hearse.”

The image of the ghost ship appears in Melville’s later short fiction. In chapter one of “Benito Cereno,” the *San Dominick*’s “hearse-like roll of her hull” caught the narrator’s attention upon the still, gray sea. She appears ghost-like when Don Alexandro Aranda’s skeleton becomes visible, lashed to the bow. And when she is taken over by the Blacks, who are unable to steer her, the *San Dominick* gains a ghost-like appearance:

“With creaking masts she came heaving round to the wind; the prow slowly swinging into view of the boats, its skeleton gleaming in the horizontal moonlight, and casting a gigantic ribbed skeleton upon the water. One arm of the ghost seemed beckoning the whites to avenge it.” (“Benito Cereno,” chapter 12)

Even in “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” which has nothing to do with the sea, Bartleby himself is once described as “a bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic.”

In chapter fifty-one of *Moby Dick*, the sea ravens “deemed our ship some drifting, uninhabited craft; a thing appointed to desolation.” The ghost ship provided Melville with a complex and interesting metaphor; it became more than a mere device to incite feelings of horror. While the ship is technically “dead,” it is given life by the sea that carries it along to potential collisions, which in turn may bring death to manned vessels.

A short story by William Leete Stone, “The Spectre Fire-Ship,” appeared in *The Knickerbocker* in 1834.²⁸ Melville may have been familiar with this story, seeing that it was published in the same popular periodical where J.N. Reynolds’ “Mocha Dick” story appeared in 1839. In Stone’s story, “the sea was soon lashed to a foam, and ran literally mountains high” just before the ghost ship appeared. The fire ship beckoned the mariners on the *El Dorado* to “come on board” and the ship’s captain, Captain Warner, plunged into the sea issuing “a shrill piercing cry of distress.”

Still other stories of ghost ships had been published in American periodicals that Melville might have read. These include two anonymous pieces; “Skeleton of the Wreck” and “The Demon Ship”, and “The Haunted Brig” by John W. Gould. Better-known ghost ships in literature were Edgar Allan Poe’s “MS Found in a Bottle” and British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”. A shipmate of Melville’s, E. Curtiss Hine, composed a poem, “The Haunted Barque,” which was published in 1848.²⁹ The same year saw the publication of a novel by Hine entitled *Orlando Melville or Victims of the Press Gang*. Interestingly enough, Hine may have been the prototype for Melville’s character, Lensford, the poet in *White Jacket*.³⁰

“The Death Craft” contains the image of the ship as a horse: “As docile as the managed steed she swerved aside, and once more sent the spray heaving from her bows.” John M.J. Gretchko noted that the “ship or boat as horse is a common sailor image in Melville’s writings...” Gretchko noted the image had been used in “The Death Craft,” and states that he believes as well that this story was “probably an early Melville tale.”³¹ Some examples of this metaphor include the following:

[a] distant ship, revealing only the tops of her masts, seems struggling forward ... through the tall grass of a rolling prairie: as when the western emigrants’ horses only show their erected ears, while their hidden bodies widely wade through the amazing verdure.” (*Moby Dick*, chapter 114)

“...and in a moment the prancing Julia, suddenly arrested in her course, bridled her head like a steed reined in, while the foam flaked under her bows.” (*Omoo*, chapter 23)

“And along they swept; till the three prows neighed to the blast; and pranced on their path, like steeds of Crusaders.” (*Mardi*, chapter 558)

“At last we hoisted the stun’-sails up to the top-sail yards; and as soon as the vessel felt them, she gave a sort of bound like a horse, and the breeze blowing more and more, she went plunging along, shaking off the foam from her bows, like foam from a bridle-bit.” (*Redburn*, chapter 66)

Melville’s use of exclamation and hyperbole in “The Death Craft” (“Great God! There she lay! ... See! See! The Death Craft! ... Blast my vision, Oh God! Blast it ere I rave!”) typifies the powerful rhetoric found in later works. Melville scholar Brian Short, in *Cast by Means of Figures* treats Melville’s rhetoric in his second “Fragment,” but does not mention “The Death Craft.”³² Similar figures of speech used by Melville include the following:

“Six months at Sea!” (*Typee*)

“We are off!” (*Mardi*)

“Call me Ishmael” “Blast the boat! Let it go!” “Great God! but for one single instant, show thyself!” (*Moby Dick*)

“Confusion seize the Greek!” “Great God, she was dumb! DUMB AND DEAF!” (“Fragments from a Writing Desk, No. 1”)

“Harry Bolton! it was even he!” (*Redburn*)

Melville’s writings clearly show his fascination with the sometimes enchanting, often horrific stare of the human eye. The mesmeric glance of the “ghastly appendage on the jib-boom” and the “glazed eye” of the dead helmsman in “The Death Craft” remind one immediately of the fiery glance of the “Andalusian eyes” of the enchantress in the second “Fragment from a Writing Desk.” The image is repeated four times in *Redburn*. The eyes of the “living corpse” in chapter forty-eight were “open and fixed,” and in chapter twenty-two the eyes of Jackson “seemed to kindle more and more, as if he were going to die out at last, and leave them burning like tapers before a corpse.” Later, in chapter fifty-five the “snaky eyes” of the dying Jackson “rolled in red sockets,” reminiscent of how the narrator’s eyes in “The Death Craft” “felt as though coals of fire were in their sockets.” In chapter fifty-nine, the “blue hollows” of Jackson’s eyes “were like vaults full of snakes... he looked like a man raised from the dead.”

In chapter 130 of *Moby Dick*, Ishmael remarks “there lurked a something in... [Ahab’s] eyes, which it was hardly sufferable for feeble souls to see.” The eyes of the cosmopolitan held a strange “power of persuasive fascination” in chapter forty-two of *The Confidence Man*. In chapter nineteen of *Billy Budd*, Claggart’s eyes had a “look such as might have been seen that of the spokesman of the envious children of Jacob deceptively imposing upon the troubled patriarch of the blood-dyed coat of young Joseph.” In chapter 124 of *Moby Dick*, the “distended eye” of the dead Parsee “turned full on old Ahab.” In chapter eighty-nine of *White Jacket*, the narrator enters the “hospital” to visit the sick, “and as I advanced, some of them rolled upon me their sleepless, silent, tormented eyes.”

In Book III (ii) of *Pierre*, the title character, entranced by the look on a woman’s face, first thinks of a Gorgon, but “not by repelling hideousness did it spite him so; but bewilderingly allured him...” Her “face haunted him as some imploring, and beauteous, impassioned ideal Madonna’s haunts the... ever-baffled artist.” In chapter thirty-eight of *Moby Dick*, Melville again evokes this image by comparing the white whale to a “demigorgon.” “Hark! the infernal orgies!” in the

same passage immediately reminds one of the gorgon-head in “The Death Craft” beginning its “infernal orgies” that terrified the narrator.

The Mate’s wild leap into the sea in “The Death Craft” brings to mind not only the memorable plunges of Pip (in *Moby Dick*) and White Jacket but also the “shaking man who jumped over the bows” in chapter ten of *Redburn*. Despite the fact that a fall overboard was not an uncommon occurrence, for Melville these plunges took on a far deeper, metaphysical significance. In “The Death Craft,” the mate’s wild leap leaves such a vivid impression on the narrator’s mind (much like young Wellingborough Redburn’s) that it “even now haunts” him as he recalls the episode.

Melville introduced the concept of “ghastly whiteness” in three metaphors in “The Death Craft,” all which would appear in later works. Melville’s use of “ghastly whiteness” in *Moby Dick* to symbolize fear, corruption, inscrutability and death is universally known; all of chapter sixty-two is devoted to explaining “The Whiteness of the Whale.” The importance of the concept of ghastly whiteness cannot be overemphasized. Paul Brodtkorp, Jr., in *Ishmael’s White World*, concludes after in-depth analysis that whiteness is not merely a portent of other horrors, but it possesses a “dread” and “a ghastly horror” in itself.³³

Five references to such ghastly whiteness are found in “The Death Craft,” written a decade earlier. Melville may have seized upon this metaphor from the published legend that formed the basis for *Moby Dick*—the story “Mocha Dick: or the White Whale of the Pacific”:

“As he drew near, with his long curved back looming occasionally above the surface of the billows, we perceived that it was white as the surf around him; and the men stared aghast at each other, as they uttered in a suppressed tone, the terrible name of MOCHA DICK!”³⁴

We first notice the horrific connotation of whiteness in “The Death Craft,” in the flapping sails whose “snowy whiteness dazzled . . . [the] eyes” of the narrator. The light canvas “stun’-sails” in chapter thirteen of *Redburn* present a similar appearance when young Redburn looks aloft:

“spread . . . away out beyond the ends of the yards, where they overhang the wide water, like the wings of a great bird.”

This image brings to mind the ghost-like function of the white-winged albatross in *Moby Dick*. In chapter seventy-four of *White Jacket*, the “immense area of snow-white canvas sliding along the sea was indeed a magnificent spectacle.” And John Gretchko notes still other places in *Redburn* and *White Jacket* where

Melville likens the dazzling appearance of a flapping sail aloft to the wings of a great white bird.³⁵

The image of the skeleton hanging from the yard-arm of the “Death Craft” is equally horrific, “whiter than polished ivory and glistening in the fierce rays of the sun.” Each “chalky” portion of the skeleton seemed “beckoning” the narrator toward it, to be then held in the clutches of its “wild embrace.” In chapter seven of “Benito Cereno,” the old wreck of the *San Dominick’s* long boat is described as “warped as a camel’s skeleton in the desert, and almost as bleached.” When the derelict *San Dominick* first appears in that work (chapter one), it looks as if it were “launched . . . from Ezekiel’s Valley of Dry Bones”; the Biblical reference recalls a desert full of skeletons lying in the hot sun. The skeleton of the murdered Don Alexandro Aranda gives the *San Dominick’s* prow, to which it is lashed, a likewise ghastly appearance:

“suddenly revealing, as the bleached hull swung round toward the open ocean, death for the figure-head, in a human skeleton; chalky comment on the chalked words below, ‘Follow your Leader.’” (“Benito Cereno,” chapter 11)

In chapter fifty-two of *Moby Dick*, Ishmael notices the “spectral appearance” of the ship *Goney* (a name synonymous with albatross): “The craft was bleached like the skeleton of a stranded walrus . . . all her spars and her rigging were like the thick branches of trees furred over with hoar-frost.” In chapter seventy of *White Jacket* the frigate is said to have “laid her broken bones upon the Antarctic shores . . .” In chapter 102, amid the green verdant foliage, the “great, white . . . skeleton” of a beached sperm whale stands out against the darker background.

The “milk white crest tossed high in the air” that devoured some of the crew of the “Death Craft” brings to mind the terrifying appearance of the white whale, “a hump like a snow hill” rising from the sea, in chapter 133 of *Moby Dick*, and the description by Reynolds of “Mocha Dick” quoted beforehand. The narrator’s vessel in “The Death Craft” would “have gone to fill the rapacious maw of the deep,” much like being swallowed by the Leviathan white whale, if it had not been instantly righted from a precarious vertical position. In “The Death Craft,” the “dying wretches” who were engulfed by the wave with the “milk white crest . . . fed the finny tribes.” Twice in *Mardi* Melville repeats this phrase. In chapter thirteen, the deadly sharks (“Killers and Thrashers”) are “the most spirited and spunky of the finny tribes,” and in chapter thirty-eight he again mentions “the larger varieties of the finny tribes.”

When asked the fate of the drowned Mate in “The Death Craft,” the narrator, “with preternatural effort,” pointed to the “foaming surface of the deep.” Foam is clearly associated with the horrific connotations of whiteness in Melville’s writing. In chapter thirty-six of *Mardi*, when a storm “seemed about to overtake” the ship,

“... the noiseless cloud stole on; its advancing shadow lowering over a distinct and prominent milk-white crest upon the surface of the ocean. But now this line of surging foam came rolling down upon us like a white charge of cavalry...”

In the same work, Melville mentioned also “foam white, breaking billows” (chapter 168) and the sea’s “margin frothy white with foam” (chapter 170). In chapter fifty-four of *Moby Dick*, Radney of the *Town Ho* was swept “through a blinding foam that blent two whiteness together” before being swallowed by Moby Dick.

In the first Chapter of “Benito Cereno,” the *San Dominick*, suddenly in view on top of the swells, “appeared like a white-washed monastery after a thunder-storm, seen perched among some dun cliff of the Pyrenees.” Given Melville’s intense disdain for religious orders and missionaries, and more specifically his various negative references to monks and other clerics in “Benito Cereno,” the image of the bleached monastery is clearly one of ghastly whiteness.

Two Melville prototype characters appear first in “The Death Craft.” The narrator of “The Death Craft” fits into the Melville character of the “Young Seeker” whose prototypes include Tommo, Redburn, White Jacket, Taji, and Ishmael. James E. Miller, Jr., identifies this important persona in *A Reader’s Guide to Herman Melville*.³⁶ The “Young Seeker” becomes disillusioned when he finds evil lurking, covered by a thin veneer of monetary generosity and piety by “merchants of death and missionaries of sin.” The “Young Seeker” is discussed at some length by Richard Chase: “the young man who enters upon life proudly but forlornly, who suffers much and learns much among the brutal realities” of ship-board life, the teeming city like London, and even strange cultures in a supposed South Sea paradise.³⁷ Harry Bolton in *Redburn* is another innocent seeker; in fact the name “Harry the Reefer” may have been inspired by Melville’s seamate, who he later named “Harry Bolton.”

The narrator in “The Death Craft,” as Leonard Pops properly notes, “is a standard figure in the Melville oeuvre,” namely “the rover.”³⁸ “The Death Craft” is signed “Harry the Reefer,” a name suggesting a rover or beachcomber, as Herman’s friend and neighbor, Hiram Hawkins, had styled himself in one of his letters to home:

“Now, I being one of that class of individuals who are said always to be open for ‘freight or charter,’ which . . . means lacking steadiness of purpose, and possessing a roving disposition, ready to take up every ‘chimera’ where chances bid fair to win. . . .”³⁹

Melville was clearly drawn to this character in fiction. Dr. Long Ghost in *Omoo* and the roving narrator of *Typee* also are manifestations of this type. How much more appropriate a nom de plume for an adventuresome young sailor and author than “L.A.V.,” the bloodless pseudonym Melville had chosen for his “Fragments” a few months earlier. “The Death Craft” clearly demonstrates how Herman Melville’s first sea voyage had left an indelible mark on his literary career.

Newspapers of the day, particularly the large city dailies, featured little news on other pieces of local significance, and even less original literature. William Lamb, however, commenting in 1840 on the two years since he first “hoisted the sail of the *Democratic Press*,” thanked the “few literary friends who have favored us with the pencillings of their thoughts.” “Original pieces,” he added, “add much interest to the pages of a weekly periodical. They are indeed, portraits of the times in which we live, and should be encouraged. They are beneficial to the writer, the present and future reader . . . and [it is] gratifying to see one’s own thoughts in print.”⁴⁰ Was William Lamb thinking of Herman Melville, who had “tendered a willing pen” for the local editor, to “ramble in the fields of imagination” and enter the world of Gothic fiction?

Other anonymous prose pieces attributed to Herman Melville exist. Six of them, less important than “The Death Craft” but nonetheless interesting, are also included in the Northwestern-Newberry definitive edition of *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces, 1839–1860*.⁴¹ The five poems signed “H” that I discovered published in the *Democratic Press* in 1838 and 1839 will be mentioned in the forthcoming Northwestern-Newberry edition of Melville’s poetry.⁴² Laurie Robertson-Lorant noted that “a number of scholars believe that there are still newspaper sketches by Melville waiting to be discovered and identified.”⁴³ On the other hand, the long, undistinguished narrative poem, *Redburn: or the Schoolmaster of a Morning* (1845), attributed to Melville by Jeanne C. Howes, was identified as the work of a John Carroll. The poem was merely the source of the name Melville chose for the title of his autobiographical novel, in spite of some interesting coincidences, such as Herman having worked briefly as a country schoolmaster.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, other manuscripts or anonymous published works by Melville may be “out there,” waiting to be discovered.

Endnotes

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4. Henry B. Nason, *Biographical Records of the Officers and Graduates of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute* (Troy, N.Y.: 1887), pp. 236-37.
5. William H. Gilman and Merrell R. Davis, *The Letters of Herman Melville* (New Haven: 1960) pp. 61-63.
6. *Lansingburgh Gazette*, March 14, 1850.
7. Melville's journal, October 14, 1859, cited in Leyda, vol. 1, p. 321.
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9. *Democratic Press (and Lansingburgh Advertiser)*, April 20, 1839.
10. *Democratic Press (and Lansingburgh Advertiser)*, May 18, 1839.
11. Gilman, pp. 111-120.
12. Gilman, p. 264.
13. Gilman, p. 108.
14. Walter Donald Kring, *Herman Melville's Religious Journey* (Raleigh, NC: 1997), pp. 16-22.
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16. Gilman, p. 327.
17. Leon Howard, *Herman Melville: A biography* (Berkeley: 1951), p. 29.
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20. Broderick, ["The Death Craft"], *The Idol*, Spring 1973, xiv:2, pp. 21-27.
21. Broderick, "'Their Snowy Whiteness dazzled My Eyes': 'The Death Craft'—Melville's First Maritime Story," *The Hudson Valley Regional Review*, March 1986, 3:1, pp. 91-106.
22. Robertson-Lorant, *Melville: A Biography* (N.Y.: 1996), p. 628.
23. Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville, A Biography, Volume 1, 1819-1851* (Baltimore, 1996), pp. 154; Laurie Robertson-Lorant, *Melville: A Biography* (N.Y., 1996), p. 77; Edwin Haviland Miller, *Melville* (N.Y.: 1975, pp. 69-70; Andrew Delbanco, *Melville: His Life and Work* (N.Y.: 2005), p. 30; Carl Rollyson and Lisa Paddock, *Herman Melville A to Z* (N.Y.:2001 p. 54.
24. Max Putzel, "The Source and Symbols of Melville's 'Benito Cereno'..." *American Literature* 34 (May, 1962), pp. 191-206.
25. "Benito Cereno" contained no "chapters" in its original publication. The chapters cited here for convenience of reference refer to an html edition, prepared by Ken Roberts, for publication on the Internet. The section numbers and captions have been added for convenience, and were not in the original text.
26. Harold Scudder, "Melville's 'Benito Cereno' and *Captain Delano's Voyages*," *PMLA*, 1928, pp. 530-532.
27. Lawrance Thompson, *Melville's Quarrel with God* (Princeton, 1952), pp. 73-89.
28. William Leete Stone, "The Spectre Fire-Ship," *Knickerbocker*, May 1834, pp. 361-370.
29. anon., "The Skeleton of the Wreck," *The Ladies' Literary Portfolio* 1 (January 7, 1829), p. 29; anon., "The Demon Ship: A Pirate of the Mediterranean," *Godey's Lady's Book* 2 (March, 1831), pp.

- 137-147; John W. Gould, "The Haunted Brig," *New-York Mirror* XI (May 17, 1834), p. 1, reissued in *John W. Gould's Private Journal of a Voyage from New York to Rio de Janeiro...* (N.Y.: 1839); E. Curtiss Hine, *The Haunted Barque and Other Poems* (Auburn, NY: 1848), pp. 2-15)
30. Parker, p. 272.
 31. John M.J. Gretchko, *Melvillean Loomings: Essays on "Moby Dick"* (Cleveland, 1992) pp. 22-27.
 32. Brian Short, *Cast By Means of Figures* (Amherst, MA: 1992), pp. 18-22.
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 34. J.N. Reynolds, "MOCHA DICK: or the White Whale of the Pacific: a Leaf from a Manuscript Journal," *Knickerbocker*, May 1839, p. 383.
 35. Gretchko, p. 26.
 36. James E. Miller, *A Reader's Guide to Herman Melville* (N.Y.: 1962), pp. 6-9.
 37. Richard Chase, *Herman Melville: A Critical Study* (N.Y.: 1949), pp. 2-9.
 38. Pops, p. 259.
 39. Letter to his brother, Henry Hawkins, April 11, 1851, reprinted in *Lansingburgh Gazette*, June 17, 1851.
 40. *Democratic Press (and Lansingburgh Advertiser)*, January 4, 1840.
 41. Herman Melville, *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces, 1839-1860*. (Evanston, IL: 1987), pp. 428-456.
 42. Per telephone conversation with Hershel Parker, October 2007
 43. Robertson-Lorant, p.628.
 44. Parker, p.638. The book of criticism he refers to is Jeanne C. Howes, *Poet of a Morning: Herman Melville and the "Redburn" Poem*. (San Francisco: 2001)

Regional History Forum

Each issue of *The Hudson River Valley Review* includes the *Regional History Forum*. This section highlights historic sites in the Valley, exploring their historical significance as well as information for visitors today. Although due attention is paid to sites of national visibility, HRVR also highlights sites of regional significance. Please write us with suggestions for future Forum sections.



Boscobel in Spring

Boscobel: A House Museum of the Federal Period

Maria Zandri

“Let us step back in time to 1822.” These are the first words I heard upon entering Boscobel with my tour guide, Marie. Located in Garrison, Putnam County, this Federal-period gem is celebrating its bicentennial this year. But as fascinating as the architecture and collection of antiques in this house museum is the story of its original owners, States and Elizabeth Dyckman.

Born in the mid-1700s in Manhattan, States Dyckman had a difficult childhood filled with financial hardships; by the age of twenty-two, he had left home. While in Albany in 1776, he was seen toasting King George III and arrested for being a Loyalist. Dyckman escaped from prison and fled to New York City, where he established a lucrative job working for the Quartermaster's Department of the British army.

Dyckman's business with the department, which involved covering up the corrupt activities of his superiors, eventually took him to England at the end of the American Revolution. While there, he amassed a respectable amount of wealth from individual quartermasters—payment for his discretion about their wartime business practices. With this money, he planned to make himself a comfortable life if he was allowed to return to the newly independent United States. Over the years, States' Loyalist activities had kept him separated from his family, with whom he was very close. After a prolonged exile, he longed to return to New York and settle down. In 1789, Dyckman was able to do that, with the help of his brother Samson, who also assisted him in finding a new home, King's Grange, located on Verplank's Point.

Dyckman lived at King's Grange with his ailing mother; his sister Catalina (who was facing marital problems and a laudanum addiction); a housekeeper, Sil; and several slaves. He transformed his house into a 240-acre farm with a saw mill and cider mill. Another wealthy former Loyalist, Peter Corne, had a home nearby. A master mariner, Corne had known Dyckman in London. Now he lived with his granddaughter, Elizabeth. Soon after meeting, Elizabeth and States began a relationship. In 1794, forty-one-year-old States and eighteen-year-old Elizabeth were wed. After a large-scale redecorating effort, Elizabeth moved into King's Grange. By 1799, the Dyckmans had expanded their family with the birth of children Peter Corne Dyckman and Catalina Letitia Dyckman.

Soon after their marriage, the Dyckmans began to have financial difficulties, brought on by States' extravagant spending, which he believed helped him gain social prestige. He was forced to sell King's Grange and relocate to a smaller farm. Making matters worse, the lifetime annuity promised to Dyckman from quartermaster Sir William Erskine came to a stop when Erskine passed away and his family froze the payments. At the same time, a faulty payment from the new owners of King's Grange forced Dyckman to resell the home and move into an even smaller dwelling. States' occupation was now listed officially as dirt farmer.

After borrowing large amounts of money from Elizabeth's family, Dyckman was able to return to England to reclaim the Erskine annuity. After four years, most of which was spent working on the quartermasters' accounts, he returned

home not only with the Erskine funds, but with payments from other former quartermasters—in total, a sum approaching the modern-day equivalent of 2.85 million dollars.

Dyckman settled back into a relaxed lifestyle and took advantage of his new wealth by buying gifts for Elizabeth, Peter, and Sil (Catalina had passed away from scarlet fever while Dyckman was in Britain) and recreating the library he'd sold to redecorate King's Grange. However, much of Dyckman's new fortune was set aside to build his dream house, Boscobel. Named after the hunting lodge in Ireland where King Charles II was exiled, it served as a beacon of Dyckman's Loyalist feelings toward England and his desire to create a haven from the hostile world. Montrose Point in Westchester County was chosen as the site of the home due to its proximity to the Hudson River. Construction began in 1806.

That August 11, States Dyckman passed away at the age of fifty-one. Only the foundation of Boscobel was complete. Thirty-year-old Elizabeth now was left to raise her son and complete and decorate the home. Two years later, she moved into Boscobel with Peter and his wife, Susan Matilda Whetten, and the couple's young daughter, Eliza Letitia.

On June 20, 1823, Elizabeth passed away. A year later, Peter also died. For some time, his widow remained at Boscobel with her daughter. In 1888, the house finally fell out of the family's ownership.

In 1924, Westchester County purchased the home and surrounding land to create Crugers Park. Boscobel was not part of park plans; its administrators did not think people would want to visit the home of a Loyalist, no matter how beautiful it was. In 1941, the house was threatened with demolition; local citizens hastily formed Boscobel Restoration, Inc., to save it. The organization leased Boscobel from the county for five years, making repairs to the house. In 1945, the land at Montrose Point was purchased by the U.S. Veterans Administration; by 1950, thirty-two buildings of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Veterans Hospital surrounded Boscobel. Despite assurances to Boscobel Restoration, Inc., that the house would be taken care of, the government declared the building an "excess" the following year. It was sold for thirty-five dollars and slated for destruction.

Led by Benjamin West Frazier, the members of Boscobel Restoration, Inc., once again stepped up to rescue the house. It was taken apart, stored in sheds and garages across the area, and eventually reconstructed after a \$50,000 donation was given anonymously by Lila Acheson Wallace, the co-founder of *Reader's Digest*. The donation was used to purchase a plot of land in Garrison, fifteen miles north of the home's original location. Today, Boscobel sits across from the United States Military Academy at West Point. Its grounds offer sweeping views of the Hudson



View from Boscobel over Constitution Marsh and the Hudson River

River, Constitution Island, and the Hudson Highlands. Following Mrs. Wallace's instructions, a landscaping firm was hired to design Boscobel's grounds and interior decorators to furnish its rooms. When Boscobel opened to the public in 1961, it was more a "decorator's showcase" than a house museum.

In 1975, extensive research was undertaken to determine what Boscobel would have looked like when Elizabeth and Peter made it their home in the early 1800s. With the help of the curator of the American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, it was restored to a historically accurate representation by 1977. European furnishings were replaced with American furniture. Reproduction paint, carpets, wallpaper, fabrics, and window treatments were brought in as well.

Every item in Boscobel today, except for the lemonade and gingerbread cookies offered at the end of each tour, reflect the period from 1780 to 1825. The furnishings include many pieces crafted by Duncan Phyfe, a prestigious New York furniture maker. States Dyckman had purchased several of Phyfe's pieces, and many others were added after his death. Original pieces throughout the house include export, hand-painted china depicting places States had visited in Europe and a chair that belonged to Elizabeth's grandfather. Boscobel's library contains many of States' books, each featuring his bookplate.

Upon entering Boscobel, one steps directly into the entryway, roomy enough for guests to dance after dinner. In the dining room to its left, the Duncan Phyfe table is set for a dinner party; they were held often at Boscobel. The room, which offers a gorgeous view of the Hudson River, is furnished with many original Dyckman pieces. Adjacent to it is a small butler's pantry, where food was prepared once it was brought upstairs from the kitchen. To the right of the entryway are two adjoining drawing rooms. In the rear one is an authentic 200-year-old barrel organ that still works.

The bedrooms are located up the grand staircase on the second floor. The first room to the left is a guest room. It is furnished rather plainly. Connected to it is Elizabeth Dyckman's dressing room, which is filled with wardrobes for her clothing, since dressers were not yet common. On its opposite side is Elizabeth's bedroom. Known as the "best bedroom," it affords superb views of the river, and was always warm due to the large windows and constantly burning fireplace. There is a bed and desk, a chamber pot (under the cushion of a chair), and a small table where Elizabeth could receive her meals.

Front and center on the second floor is the spacious library, which also served as a parlor during summer months. Beyond it is Peter and Susan's room, which also offered fine views. Much like Elizabeth's room, it was furnished so the couple had little need to leave it. Off this bedroom is a small room with a bathtub, although baths were a rarity in the early 1800s. The next room, located to the rear of the house, was another guest room or the room of a white servant. There were five servants in the Dyckman household—two white and five black, although none were slaves. One often was in charge of taking care of Peter and Susan's daughter, Eliza. Today, this room is known as the "nanny's room," where the white servant in charge of the baby would sleep so she could be close enough to take Eliza if she disturbed her parents at night.

A particularly interesting part of the home is the basement, where Boscobel's kitchen was located. The pine planks on the floor today came from Boscobel's attic. There is a large fireplace with many warming plates and pots. Another basement room showcases some of the small, original items that belonged to Elizabeth and States Dyckman. Displayed here are pieces of Elizabeth's monogrammed silver, the bill of sale from the candelabra States purchased (which is on display in the dining room), and a list handwritten by States describing the different locations that were hand-painted on the imported china. A brief display describing the history of the name Boscobel also is found here.

A trip to Garrison is well worth the drive to enter the life of Elizabeth Dyckman and enjoy breathtaking views from Boscobel's well-maintained grounds.

Boscobel is located on Route 9D in Garrison. It is open every day except Tuesdays, Thanksgiving, and Christmas 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. April to October and 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. in November and December. It also opens specifically for artists to explore the grounds on the second Tuesday of each month. Entrance fees are \$15 for adults, \$12 for seniors, and \$7 for children ages 6-14. Boscobel holds various educational, musical, and other programs throughout the year. For more information about Boscobel, call 845-265-3638 or visit www.boscobel.org.

Exploring Troy

Elizabeth Vielkind

The city of Troy was founded more than 200 years ago on the banks of the Hudson River. Its history encompasses the Industrial Revolution, during which the city became a major producer of detachable collars, textiles, iron, and steel. The result of this activity is the presence today of numerous historic manufacturing sites as well as opulent nineteenth-century architecture. Historic preservation here has helped revitalize the city by providing fascinating areas to explore. The heritage of this industrial region has been maintained by the Rensselaer County Historical Society (RCHS), Oakwood Cemetery, Burden Iron Works, and the RiverSpark Visitor Center.

Established in 1927, the Rensselaer County Historical Society is a non-profit educational organization that strives to “enrich the present and advocate for the future by bringing the region’s past to life... In pursuit of this mission, RCHS collects, preserves, studies, interprets and makes accessible a broad variety of objects and documents, and conducts educational programs to inspire public enthusiasm for the past.” The museum is located in two adjacent nineteenth-

century townhouses—the historic and architecturally significant Hart-Cluett House and the Carr Building.

RCHS programs include exhibitions about Troy’s history that can be viewed in person or online. The museum has an extensive collection that includes furniture encompassing all major nineteenth-century styles, painting and sculpture, decorative arts (including major holdings of glassware, ceramics, and silver), costumes and textiles from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, household items, locally manufactured stoneware and iron-



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The Hart-Cluett House, now RCHS

ware, and artifacts relating to Troy's contributions to American military history. (The RCHS also manages and administers the largest local library archives and research center in Rensselaer County; it is comprised of more than 30,000 items spanning three centuries.)

The museum's "Resourceful People Orientation Gallery" provides visitors and members with highlights from the permanent collection and offers an interactive tour of the county via computer. It also provides an orientation to the museum and RCHS. Guided tours of the Federal-style Hart-Cluett House give visitors a glimpse of how wealthy New Yorkers lived in the early nineteenth century.

That was when Troy's rich history began. The accumulation of wealth from local industry was used to build lavish mansions, magnificent churches, and grand public buildings. One of the grandest was the white marble townhouse that New York merchant and banker William Howard constructed for his only child, Betsey, and her husband, Richard P. Hart, an entrepreneur and president of the Troy Savings Bank. The Hart-Cluett House's architecture and decor represent the finest in nineteenth-century design and craftsmanship.

The house's second and third owners, George B. Cluett and his nephew, Albert E. Cluett, were involved in the business of manufacturing collars and shirts—and are a prime reason Troy earned the nickname "The Collar City." At its height, Cluett, Peabody & Co. employed 3,000 workers in its factories and as pieceworkers in homes throughout the city. Like the Harts before them, the Cluetts contributed to many philanthropic ventures in Troy. Recognizing the house's historic importance, Albert Cluett and his wife, Caroline Cluett, donated it to the RCHS in 1952.

Oakwood Cemetery, one of America's largest rural cemeteries, overlooks 100 miles of the Hudson Valley as well as downtown Troy. From the 1600s to the early 1800s, burials in American cities were usually in church yards or city burial grounds. As cities grew in size, these burying grounds became inadequate. Doctor Jacob Bigelow of Harvard University advocated the creation of suburban "rural" cemeteries. (A prime factor in the location of these cemeteries was the escalating price of inner-city real estate, which pushed less profitable uses to the municipalities' outskirts.) To make up for their distance from downtowns, rural cemeteries often were filled with natural or manmade ponds, trees, and shrubs." Mount Auburn, established in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1831, was America's first rural cemetery.

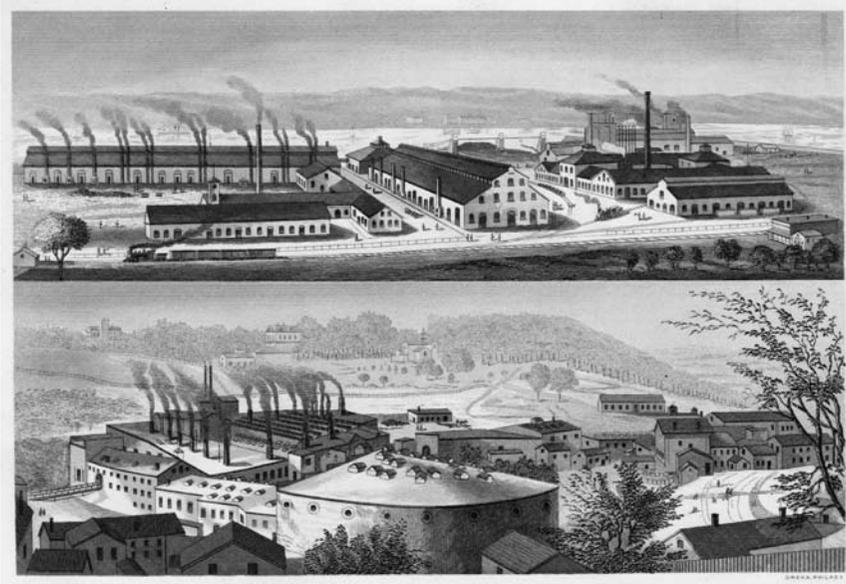
Mount Auburn's appeal was in "the romantic tradition, fitting in the gentle, informal contours of nature in a woodland setting." It inspired the creation of similar cemeteries in cities all over the United States, particularly on the East

Coast. In 1848, Oakwood Cemetery was established. It emulated Mount Auburn's model of "resurrection-in-nature," incorporating winding roads, ponds, waterfalls, statuary, and forests. It is a prime example of what a rural cemetery was meant to represent:

A beautiful retreat for citizens, to walk quietly in peaceful, natural surroundings while meditating on the deceased or caring for their family plots while picnicking. These rural cemeteries were the precursors and models for the large public parks... They were social meeting grounds, even serving as showcases for marriage-eligible daughters. Cities that created cemeteries as green spaces with heavy picturesque planting found that tens of thousands of visitors arrived to walk among the graves. (Troy Cemetery Association)

Since its inception, Oakwood Cemetery has become the final resting place for many prominent Americans, including Samuel Wilson, a prosperous meat-packer whose nickname—"Uncle Sam"—was transferred to the venerable figure personifying the United States government during the War of 1812, when Troy was an important center for assembling munitions and food for the army. In 1961, Samuel Wilson was formally recognized by Congress as the progenitor of the "Uncle Sam" icon, which has represented America around the world.

Another notable historic site in Troy is the Burden Iron Works, which once was home to the Burden Water Wheel—sixty-two feet in diameter and twenty-two



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Burden Iron Works

feet in breadth. Water to turn it came from a small stream, the Wynantskill. Its inventor was Henry Burden, an engineer whose horseshoe-making machine was a wonder of technology. Burden immigrated to the United States in 1819 from Scotland. In 1822, he began working in Troy's iron industry as the superintendent of the Troy Iron and Nail factory. Burden's innovative ideas helped make the factory extremely profitable. He soon took over the factory and renamed the business H. Burden and Sons.



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Burden Iron Works Office

Although the water wheel no longer stands, Burden and Sons' office building now houses the Burden Iron Works Museum, which delves into Troy's industrial history. It contains objects manufactured in the city throughout the nineteenth century, when its "factories produced parts of the *U.S.S. Monitor*, the replacement for the Liberty Bell, and some of the world's most innovative products, including stoves, mass-produced horseshoes and railroad spikes, detachable shirt collars, fire hydrants and surveying equipment." (www.hudsonrivervalley.com)

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The Burden Iron Works museum is operated by the Hudson Mohawk Industrial Gateway, which also maintains downtown Troy's *Riverspark* Visitor Center. The center offers a great introduction to Troy and its rich industrial heritage. It also offers a self-guided walking tour that enables visitors to admire the city's large collection of Tiffany windows illustrating religious, historic, and pastoral themes. Among the ten sites on the tour are St. Paul's Episcopal Church, St. John's Episcopal Church, St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, and the Hart Memorial Library.

The Rensselaer County Historical Society is open noon to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, February to December 23. Admission is: \$5 adults, \$4 seniors, and \$3 youth (12-18 yrs.). Children under 12 are free. Members always receive free admission, as do students with ID. RCHS can be contacted by phone at 518-272-7232, or visited online at www.rchsonline.org. Oakwood Cemetery's Avenue Gate is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily. Additional history and virtual tours are available at www.oakwoodcemetery.org. The Burden Iron Works Museum is open by appointment only; www.hudsonmohawkgateway.org. Dates and hours of operation at the Troy's Riverspark Visitor Center vary throughout the year; call (518) 270-8667 or visit www.troyvisitorcenter.org for more information.

Winter, New York State

Judith Saunders

Weather rehearses ancient laws;
a polar passion congeals tears.
The Hudson freezes before it thaws.

As insult triggers fiercest vows
and unpaid debt claims vast arrears,
weather affirms immutable laws.

Retribution broods, withdraws
to whet with wind its glacial sneers.
The Hudson freezes before it thaws.

Unsated vengeance frets and gnaws
while Tat stalks Tit through snow-bound years.
Weather repeats implacable laws.

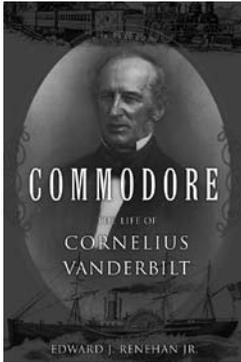
When bleak effects betray their cause,
when silence sounds its stony jeers,
the Hudson freezes...and then it thaws.

Wintry schemes can cut like shears
with blades of ice, so cold it sears.
Weather enforces bitter laws:
the Hudson freezes before it thaws.

Book Reviews

Edward J. Renehan, Jr. *The Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt*.

New York: Basic Books, 2007. (364 pp.)



When learning about the life of Cornelius Vanderbilt, one is forgiven for wondering if Dickens already had a model for Ebenezer Scrooge when he published *A Christmas Carol* in 1843. It seems by all accounts that Vanderbilt thoroughly out-Scrooged Scrooge himself, for even Scrooge ended up seeing the error of his ways; the Commodore, however, who died an old man in 1877 as the second-richest American ever after John D. Rockefeller, gave only a paltry amount of his wealth to philanthropy, leaving the bulk of his fortune to the one son he berated the most. Bah, humbug indeed. But although he was an infamous miser, at least he wasn't a boring one: far from content to sit and count his money as it rolled in, the Commodore had an undeniable thirst for adventure. In the heat of the Civil War, for example, he not only offered Lincoln his prized ship to ram the famous Confederate ironclad *Merrimac*, but suggested he captain the mission himself.

In his new biography *Commodore: The Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt*, noted historian Edward J. Renehan, Jr., uses meticulous research to piece together the business life of one of the most notorious characters of a nascent nineteenth-century America. Vanderbilt's importance to modern American business is undeniable—New York City would be more like Teaneck or Providence today if Vanderbilt hadn't almost singlehandedly made it a crossroads of commerce—and Renehan's work gives us the first authoritative account since 1942 of the man who put the *robber* in robber baron. Vanderbilt was not alone, of course, in this exclusive club of American tycoons, but his contemporaries such as Jay Gould and Andrew Carnegie seem to have had at least some modicum of charity for their fellow man. In *Commodore*, however, Cornelius Vanderbilt is depicted as a man whose sole motivation was profit. His business acumen is clearly the focus here: through the numerous transactions and dealings that the author uncovers, we see Vanderbilt as a brilliant bully, an abusive and lonely man whose peerlessness in finance was in direct contrast to his boorishness in social circles.

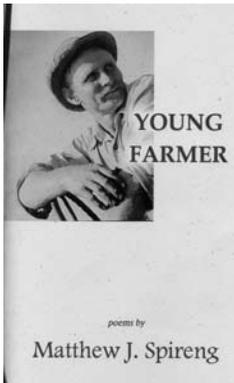
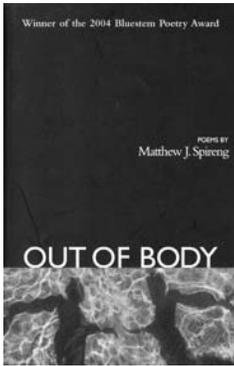
Renehan's depth of research here is nothing less than astonishing. He tracks down the smallest clues to help depict Vanderbilt's business affairs, and includes

new evidence that posits Vanderbilt's erratic behavior toward the end of his life was the result of a long deterioration due to syphilis. Renehan is known for his attention to detail, and it is formidable here; *Commodore* will undoubtedly be of great value to the serious student of American history and finance. However, at times the research piles up, making some sections of the book feel more like an inventory of facts than a crafted historical portrait. The casual reader might be looking for a more compelling story; offering a warts-and-all portrait of a historical figure is important, but at some point those warts should be attached to a face. Fans of Renehan's moving and passionate investigation of Theodore Roosevelt, the 1999 masterpiece *Lion's Pride*, might be disappointed here with the lack of a compelling narrative that made that earlier work such a pleasure to read. Of course, Vanderbilt is a less-admired subject than someone like Roosevelt, but that does not make him any less interesting: after all, here was a man who abused his family but also dabbled in spiritualism in the desperate hope of contacting his beloved son from beyond the grave. Here was an inscrutable miser who also chose to set up his favorite saloon girls on Wall Street as the first female stockbrokers. Renehan's account of Vanderbilt's business dealings is undeniably exhaustive, but one wonders if he couldn't have explored Vanderbilt's personal nature with that same vigor.

Nevertheless, Renehan's account is a valuable and commendable one. A biography of Cornelius Vanderbilt is no easy task given the fact he was largely illiterate; a lack of personal correspondence makes it nearly impossible to explore his intimate thoughts and desires. *Commodore* is a worthy complement to Renehan's previous investigation of Vanderbilt's contemporary Gould in *Dark Genius of Wall Street*. Throughout his celebrated career, Renehan's primary strength has been his ability to provide clear and valid research in uncovering new viewpoints on his subjects. In that regard, *Commodore* will not disappoint.

Tommy Zurhellen

Matthew J. Spireng. *Out of Body*. Emporia, KS: Bluestem Press, 2006. (86 pp.)
Young Farmer. Georgetown, KY: Finishing Line Press, 2007. (29 pp.)



Matthew J. Spireng is a Kingston-based writer whose poems have appeared since 1990 in a variety of little magazines and literary journals. With the publication of two collections of poetry in the past year, he has begun to earn national recognition for his work. The book *Out of Body*, winner of the 2005 Bluestem Poetry Award, demonstrates Spireng's commitment to formal simplicity as well as his close connectedness to the natural world around him. A lifelong resident of the Hudson Valley, he writes extensively about the flora and fauna familiar to him as runner, hiker, and rural householder. "Sometimes when I run," he confides, "I see things no one else has seen / before me: the great heron at the pond," for instance ("Running"). The concealed or overlooked phenomena that catch his attention may prove to be unexpectedly lovely, but sometimes dangerous or even grotesque, like the eels lurking deep in the "wet bottom ooze" of Esopus Creek ("Diving for the Bottom"). A hawk's cry as it dives toward its prey sounds "like an incoming shell— / that high-pitched whistle / before it explodes—" ("Thinking of Things That Come from Above"). Spireng manifests empathy or admiration for a broad spectrum of creatures, not excepting the often reviled skunk. Mulling over his readings about the creature's diet and spraying capacity, he wonders why naturalists have neglected to pay homage to "the whiteness of skunks" ("Certain Reference Books"). Caught in the headlights of an approaching vehicle, "some appear almost pure / white, a plume of light," and it is this "unapproachable beauty," he insists—not "their / dark odor"—that causes motorists to "avoid striking / them."

Without heavy-handedness, the poet points frequently to the ecological implications of human technology and its intrusions. When a killdeer's nest is destroyed by a tractor, for example, he describes the female bird feigning injury, behaving exactly as she would if confronted by some natural threat: she "cried to that roar / in vain to draw it away as if it were / a predator stalking its prey" ("Killdeer After a Late Planting in Corn"). Struck by the futile desperation of her efforts, the speaker follows the bird on foot, "giving her hope, / false as it is, her birdwork is right / for this world." These lines invite readers to ponder the

radically diminished effectiveness of behaviors evolved in a pre-industrialized world. Of what use now is a strategy (“birdwork”) that enhanced the killdeer’s capacity to survive in an environment that no longer exists—an environment since supplanted and dominated by the inanimate “roar” of human engineering? Refraining from didactic or sentimental comment, the author maximizes the impact of the scene he describes.

Out of Body includes love poems and depictions of places the poet has visited, but Hudson Valley readers will find in this book abundant evidence of Spireng’s attentive affection for the local. In his most recent book, *Young Farmer*, he depicts life on a small farm located on the western side of the Hudson River, near Kingston. He assumes his adoptive father’s voice, focusing on scenes from the early part of the twentieth century. In a series of twenty-six first-person poems, he offers intimate glimpses of a physically demanding everyday routine: planting, plowing, harvesting, or clearing fields slowly and tediously with the help of a draft horse, “all day prying up and rolling rocks” (“Young Farmer Clears a Field”). A sow requires help with a breech birth; hens must be protected from foxes and hawks. The primary crop is corn, supplemented by beans, potatoes, and other vegetables. The economic well-being of the household is threatened repeatedly by vicissitudes of weather (“Young Farmer Waits for Rain”): a too-dry season (“the first / sprouts of corn withered”) frequently is followed by one too wet (“seeds / rotted in the ground”). Spireng provides a poignant and illustrative picture of the gradually losing struggle to sustain a working farm. In the years following World War II, a generation of small farmers in the Hudson River Valley began selling their land, ending a way of life. All the years of hard work are not enough in a changing economy: “Somehow it seemed the harder he’d tried / the less he’d gotten” (“Young Farmer Auctions His Farm”). The last poem in the series flatly enumerates factors leading to final defeat:

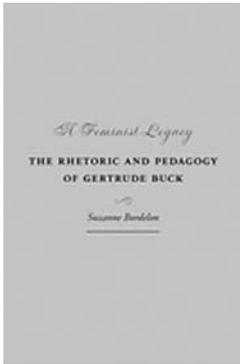
Too many losing seasons—whether timing or
weather, failed crops, or a drop in the payments
for milk. Machinery broke and before that horses
like Danny broke down...
 (“Young farmer Auctions His Farm”)

Although the trajectory of Spireng’s narrative points toward a “dreaded” conclusion, along the way readers catch glimpses of the satisfactions offered by a life lived close to the earth, in harmony with elemental forces. Resting in the haymow, enjoying “the sweet smell of dried grasses,” Young Farmer finds time “for dreaming” in between “mending fence or hoeing” (“Young Farmer Dreaming”).

Like Emily Dickinson, he keeps the Sabbath alone and out-of-doors rather than in a traditional place of worship: “not church,” but a “favorite place he’d go up near the spring” (“Young Farmer Observes the Sabbath”). When he experiences “a visitation” there under the oak tree, it is natural rather than supernatural—the unexpected sight of “a vixen with pups,” perhaps, “or a red elft on the moss.” An avid star-gazer, he sees a meteor one night, “a bright light arcing across / the sky,” and proceeds to interpret it from his own point of view, that of a cultivator: “imagined someone / out there near a distant star tilling / a stark soil, an odd plant blooming” (“Young Farmer Watches the Night Sky”). The voice remains convincingly that of the farmer, plain and rooted in particulars, but Spireng is adept at coaxing simple diction and syntax to yield evocative metaphor. For example, when Young Farmer suddenly realizes that he and his wife are approaching middle age, the riveting analogy that comes to his mind is pulled directly from his own experience: “youth taken fast / like a fox does a hen, / another thing come without warning” (“Young Farmer Learns He Won’t Be a Father”).

Only the dust jacket names the specific location of Spireng’s father’s farm as Lomontville, New York, but Hudson Valley residents will recognize on every page plant and animal life, climatic conditions, or geological features characteristic of the region. Unpretentious and accessible, these poems can be appreciated by a wide range of readers. Because they re-create a mode of living and a set of values now all but vanished, they offer historical and cultural insight as well as solid literary value.

Judith P. Saunders



A Feminist Legacy: the Rhetoric and Pedagogy of Gertrude Buck

Suzanne Bordelon. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007. (256 pp.)

“Same sex colleges have always been test beds for transformations among American women”—so read a recent article in the *The New York Times Magazine*. Suzanne Bordelon’s biography and analysis of Gertrude Buck’s, (and, by extension, her partner Laura Johnson Wylie’s), tenure, pedagogy, and politics at Vassar College during

the Progressive Era (1890-1920)² underscores these transformations—from the Suffrage movement to how rhetoric ought to be taught, from the development of the Little Theater movement to the democratization of society.

Buck, a student of John Dewey’s concept of education as key to democracy, expanded the classroom from just conveying information to a place where students were given the tools to reform and ultimately transform the greater society. She focused an activist pedagogy—using the tools of rhetoric—basing the assignments not only on student interests but developing moral citizens (48) who would function in an egalitarian democracy. Buck democratized the teaching of rhetoric, and put forward what we would recognize today as a progressive and feminist pedagogy. She integrated her own socio-political ethics into her teachings, stressing democratic principles to writing, augmentation, and the field of rhetoric. She and Wylie also practiced their feminism in the model they put forward in governing the department of English: a decentered, democratic model in which all the faculty had a voice.

In a letter to Vassar College President Henry Noble MacCracken from November 1918, Buck explained her emphasis on educating women students so they would be “capable of a greater degree of initiative and constructive intellectual activity than heretofore.” (55) She contended that the then-current educational norms were unchanged, and replicated “the military monarchy” or external authority, not a system for training “free born, thinking, self-responsible, government-making citizens of the twentieth century.” (55-56)

Her claim that the then-current education system produces what students seek—“units” (56)—is but a distant echo of the current cry on many college campuses today. Faculty decry contemporary students who are just seeking a college education as a means to a job, who focus on their grade point average rather than challenging themselves and developing critical thinking skills.

A Feminist Legacy is a window into cultural history and politics not only of the college classroom, but of the greater Poughkeepsie community, and the country. The college under President James Monroe Taylor (1886-1914) sought to educate “cultured but human, not leaders but good wives and mothers, truly liberal in things intellectual but conservative in matters social,” according to President Henry MacCracken (94), Taylor’s successor.

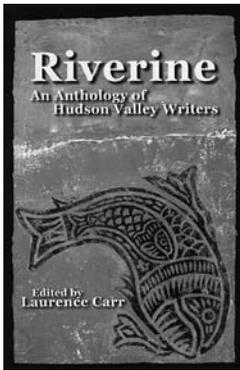
To this end, Vassar College originally sought to remove students from politics, limiting debates and lectures on issues such as the Suffrage movement which MacCracken viewed as propaganda. Vassar suffragists were prohibited from organizing and meeting on campus. Inez Milholland, then an undergraduate student at Vassar, circumvented this policy by holding a suffrage meeting in the cemetery adjacent to campus. Laura Wylie set up the Women’s Suffrage Party of Poughkeepsie shortly thereafter. Buck challenged the patriarchy herself, with the publication of two limericks, in one of which she implied that women might also participate in their own oppression, what feminist theorists today call being “internally colonized.” In the other limerick, Buck notes that male privilege is at women’s expense. Both concepts are key to feminist theory today.

Bordelon explores Buck’s development of the Little Theater movement on Vassar’s campus, which is well demonstrated by one of her most famous students Edna St. Vincent Millay. Under Buck’s guidance, Millay not only wrote but acted in various productions, a collaborative venture (149).

Buck also focused on “town-gown” issues, striving to socialize education and address social justice concerns as she tried to enrich our democracy. To this end, Buck created the Poughkeepsie Community Theatre, literally bridging the gap between the upper-middle class women attending Vassar College and the diverse community outside its gates.

A Feminist Legacy allows the reader to witness the transformations that were happening politically and socially for women not only in Vassar’s classrooms, but in the microcosm that was at that time middle America. Unfortunately, the book is more reminiscent of an academic dissertation, with far more theory and analysis than necessary. At times, I feel that Bordelon was re-iterating primary sources for the reader instead of following Buck’s own pedagogy and allowing the reader to get involved with the subject on her own. I learned a lot, but I do not think many will be willing to slog on through the dense and dry prose that belies the exciting educational, social and political life of Gertrude Buck, Vassar College, and Poughkeepsie at the beginning of the last century.

JoAnne Myers



Riverine: An Anthology of Hudson Valley Writers.

Laurence Carr, ed. New Paltz, New York:

Codhill Press, 2007. (314 pp.)

Laurence Carr, a writer who teaches Dramatic and Creative Writing at SUNY New Paltz, and David Appelbaum, the publisher of Codhill Press, have assembled a wide-ranging collection of Hudson River Valley writers for this excellent anthology. Seventy-eight Hudson River Valley writers are represented.

The first half of *Riverine* contains memoirs, short stories, microfiction, and prose poems. The second half consists of poetry, which is further divided into two sections: Hudson Valley Views and Other Realms.

In a very short Preface, Carr establishes a sense of place while extolling the Hudson River, which flows over 300 miles from the Adirondacks to New York City and claiming that it defines the region “physically, culturally, socially, and intellectually.” Not only has the Hudson River Valley been a meeting place for the world’s people, he says, but a place where words have created a powerful current of writing in both written and oral traditions.

The first two memoirs reiterate this theme. In the first selection, “How Books Changed My Life,” Da Chen recounts the importance of books and storytelling in the rural, Chinese, communist village of his childhood. The second memoir selection takes us quite literally up the Hudson River as Laurence Carr describes his move from New York City to the Hamlet of Highland. Laura Shaine Cunningham also searches for, and finally finds, “The Perfect House” in the Hudson River Valley.

The Hudson River threads through the short stories as characters leave the Valley—to fight in the Civil War, to search out happiness and turn it to confusion and fear, to move from insane asylum to group home to hospital—and return. In Jacob Appel’s “Waterloo,” a man accompanies his girlfriend to visit her sister in Waterloo and attend a dead child’s tenth birthday party, complete with cake and presents. The characters in these stories ponder inponderables: war, suicide, love, insanity, and the confusion of daily life. So often, things are not what they seem.

Guy Reed’s microfiction piece, “String Theory,” considers the cosmic nature of the Hudson River Valley as he examines the waves generated by a locomotive dropping down the slope of the Catskill Mountains toward the Hudson River. And the longest of the poems in this volume, James Finn Cotter’s “Spring Walks, Mountain Views,” describes a hike up Thomas Cole Mountain. Cotter urges the trekker to visit Artist’s Rock “to see the Hudson Valley smooth as canvas, the river

splashed on like a streak of paint.”

Other poems describe Hudson Valley flowers and trees, wildlife and birds, towns and highways. Jo Pitkin describes a photograph in “Stone House from a 1934 Walker Evans’ photograph of the Crane home, Somers, New York.” Matthew J. Spireng, in “Cutting the Oak,” describes cutting down an ancient oak tree. In “Carpentry and Gardening,” Phillip Levine describes, in exquisite and loving detail, the building of a flower box. Jacqueline Renée Ahl examines the bitterness of winter and the redemption of love in “The Laws of What Happens (*The Lefevre farmhouse, Route 32 North*).

The last section of the book, “Poetry: Other Realms,” is a wonderful wide-ranging collection. Some that stood out included “Untenanted” by Enid Dame, “Konghuin (a tune for the lyre): an excerpt,” translated by Heinz Insu Fenkl, “The Persistence of Ashes,” by Kenneth Salzmänn, and “My Mother’s Owl Collection,” by Judith Saunders. Donald Lev describes what these poets do when he says in “Twilight”: “You can hear laughter in the waves/as being is transformed into memory.”

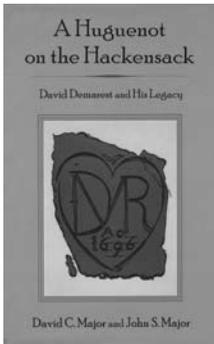
Toward the end of the book Pauline Uchmanowicz playfully asks in “Elements of Style”: “What if poets had to pick? The ocean or the stars. A reputation in truth telling or a prize in diplomacy?” In particular, the poetry in *Riverine* is hard to categorize as are the writers of the Hudson River Valley who are represented here. But this book is an excellent place to meet this diverse cadre of writers and genres.

The word “riverine” means “of the river.” Laurence Carr has assembled an anthology that goes a long ways toward capturing the literary spirit of the Hudson River Valley.

Dale Flynn

New & Noteworthy Books Received

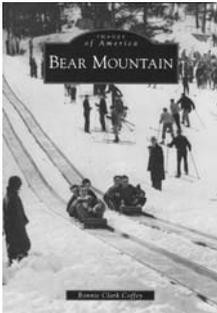
Ann Panagulias



**A Huguenot on the Hackensack:
David Demarest and His Legacy**

By David C. Major and John S. Major (Madison and Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press). 261 pp. \$29.50 (cloth).

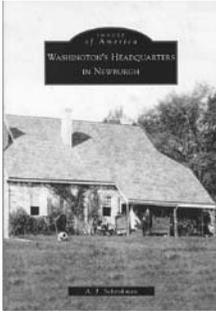
This book serves several purposes. It's a lesson in the whys and wherefores of seeking out the New World, a history of a specific region in New Jersey, and a biography of one of its most influential inhabitants. In all cases, this treasure trove is brimming with linguistic, cultural, religious, and social jewels sure to bedazzle Dutch enthusiasts on both sides of the Atlantic.



**Images of America:
Bear Mountain**

By Ronnie Clark Coffey (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing). 127 pp. \$19.99 (paperback). www.arcadiapublishing.com

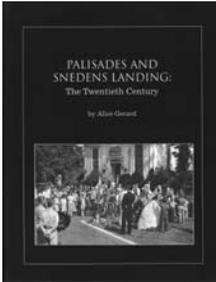
Another environmental coup conceived by women, in this case the Englewood Women's Club of New Jersey. By raising the consciousness of politicians and philanthropists alike, these ladies engendered the organization of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, which in turn spawned a spectacular park devoted to year-round recreation. The yarn unravels via vintage photos. By the looks of things, Bob Dylan seems to be the only visitor not to have gotten his money's worth!



**Images of America:
Washington's Headquarters in Newburgh**

By A.J. Schenkman (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing).
127 pp. \$19.99 (paperback). www.arcadiapublishing.com

"Images" being the operative word, the book visually traces the evolution of the structure from humble Dutch abode to haven for the Father of our Country to first building marked for preservation as a historic site. Cozily inhabiting Martha's kitchen, one imagines her culinary treats nourishing George's creativity for his Badge of Military Merit, precursor of today's Purple Heart.



**Palisades and Snedens Landing:
The Twentieth Century**

By Alice Gerard (Palisades, NY: Alice Gerard). 333 pp. (cloth).

The fulfillment of a legacy, daughter honoring mother, Ms. Gerard completes the tale as commenced by her namesake, Alice Haagensen. It's as intricately detailed, beautiful, and utilitarian as the finest handcrafted lace tablecloth. Likewise, these oral histories are passed down, lovingly preserved for a new generation of historians to tend to and appreciate. Liberally interspersed with black and white, personal photographs, it serves as a fine scrapbook of its devotedly enamored residents.

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